Advance the Struggle
- Study Group on Revolutionary Organization -

Chapter 1: Lenin & Luxemburg - Party or Class?

V. I. Lenin

Where to Begin?[2]

In recent years the question of "what is to be done" has confronted Russian Social-Democrats with particular insistence. It is not a question of what path we must choose (as was the case in the late eighties and early nineties), but of what practical steps we must take upon the known path and how they shall be taken. It is a question of a system and plan of practical work. And it must be admitted that we have not yet solved this question of the character and the methods of struggle, fundamental for a party of practical activity, that it still gives rise to serious differences of opinion which reveal a deplorable ideological instability and vacillation. On the one hand, the "Economist" trend, far from being dead, is endeavouring to clip and narrow the work of political organisation and agitation. On the other, unprincipled eclecticism is again rearing its

head, aping every new "trend", and is incapable of distinguishing immediate demands from the main tasks and permanent needs of the movement as a whole. This trend, as we know, has ensconced itself in *Rabocheye Dyelo*.[3] This journal's latest statement of "programme", a bombastic article under the bombastic title "A Historic Turn" ("*Listok*" *Rabochevo Dyela*, No. 6[4]), bears out with special emphasis the characterisation we have given. Only yesterday there was a flirtation with "Economism", a fury over the resolute condemnation of *Rabochaya Mysl*,[5] and Plekhanov's presentation of the question of the struggle against autocracy was being toned down. But today Liebknecht's words are being quoted: "If the circumstances change within twenty-four hours, then tactics must be changed within twenty-four hours." There is talk of a "strong fighting organisation for direct attack, for storming, the autocracy; of "broad revolutionary political agitation among the masses" (how energetic we are now—both revolutionary and political!); of "ceaseless calls for street protests"; of "street demonstrations of a pronounced [*sic!*] political character"; and so on, and so forth.

We might perhaps declare ourselves happy at *Rabocheye Dyelo*'s quick grasp of the programme we put forward in the first issue of *Iskra*,[6]calling for the formation of a strong well-organised party, whose aim is not only to win isolated concessions but to storm the fortress of the autocracy itself; but the lack of any set point of view in these individuals can only dampen our happiness.

Rabocheye Dyelo, of course, mentions Liebknecht's name in vain. The tactics of agitation in relation to some special question, or the tactics with regard to some detail of party organisation may be changed in twenty-four hours; but only people devoid of all principle are capable of changing, in twenty-four hours, or, for that matter, in twenty-four months, their view on the necessity—in general, constantly, and absolutely—of an organisation of struggle and of political agitation among the masses. It is ridiculous to plead different circumstances and a change of periods: the building of a fighting organisation and the conduct of political agitation are essential under any "drab, peaceful" circumstances, in any period, no matter how marked by a "declining revolutionary spirit"; moreover, it is precisely in such periods and under such circumstances that work of this kind is particularly necessary, since it is too late to form the organisation in times of explosion and outbursts; the party must be in a state of readiness to launch activity at a moment's notice. "Change the tactics within twenty-four hours"! But in order to change tactics it is first necessary to have tactics; without a strong organisation skilled in waging political struggle under all circumstances and at all times, there can be no question of that systematic plan of action, illumined by firm principles and steadfastly carried out, which alone is worthy of the name of tactics. Let us, indeed, consider the matter; we are now being told that the "historic moment" has presented our Party with a "completely new" question—the question of terror. Yesterday the "completely new" question was political organisation and agitation; today it is terror. Is it not strange to hear people who have so grossly forgotten their principles holding forth on a radical change in tactics?

Fortunately, *Rabocheye Dyelo* is in error. The question of terror is not a new question at all; it will suffice to recall briefly the established views of Russian Social-Democracy on the subject.

In principle we have never rejected, and cannot reject, terror. Terror is one of the forms of military action that may be perfectly suitable and even essential at a definite juncture in the battle, given a definite state of the troops and the existence of definite

conditions. But the important point is that terror, at the present time, is by no means suggested as an operation for the army in the field, an operation closely connected with and integrated into the entire system of struggle, but as an independent form of occasional attack unrelated to any army. Without a central body and with the weakness of local revolutionary organisations, this, in fact, is all that terror can be. We, therefore, declare emphatically that under the present conditions such a means of struggle is inopportune and unsuitable; that it diverts the most active fighters from their real task, the task which is most important from the standpoint of the interests of the movement as a whole; and that it disorganises the forces, not of the government, but of the revolution. We need but recall the recent events. With our own eyes we saw that the mass of workers and "common people" of the towns pressed forward in struggle, while the revolutionaries lacked a staff of leaders and organisers. Under such conditions, is there not the danger that, as the most energetic revolutionaries go over to terror, the fighting contingents, in whom alone it is possible to place serious reliance, will be weakened? Is there not the danger of rupturing the contact between the revolutionary organisations and the disunited masses of the discontented, the protesting, and the disposed to struggle, who are weak precisely because they are disunited? Yet it is this contact that is the sole guarantee of our success. Far be it from us to deny the significance of heroic individual blows, but it is our duty to sound a vigorous warning against becoming infatuated with terror, against taking it to be the chief and basic means of struggle, as so many people strongly incline to do at present. Terror can never be a regular military operation; at best it can only serve as one of the methods employed in a decisive assault. But can we *issue the call* for such a decisive assault at the present moment? *Rabocheye Dyelo* apparently thinks we can. At any rate, it exclaims: "Form assault columns!" But this, again, is more zeal than reason. The main body of our military forces consists of volunteers and insurgents. We possess only a few small units of regular troops, and these are not even mobilised; they are not connected with one another, nor have they been trained to form columns of any sort, let alone assault columns. In view of all this, it must be clear to anyone who is capable of appreciating the general conditions of our struggle and who is mindful of them at every "turn" in the historical course of events that at the present moment our slogan cannot be "To the assault", but has to be, "Lay siege to the enemy fortress". In other words, the immediate task of our Party is not to summon all available forces for the attack right now, but to call for the formation of a revolutionary organisation capable of uniting all forces and guiding the movement in actual practice and not in name alone, that is, an organisation ready at any time to support every protest and every outbreak and use it to build up and consolidate the fighting forces suitable for the decisive struggle.

The lesson of the February and March events[7] has been so impressive that no disagreement in principle with this conclusion is now likely to be encountered. What we need at the present moment, however, is not a solution of the problem in principle but a practical solution. We should not only be clear on the nature of the organisation that is needed and its precise purpose, but we must elaborate a definite *plan* for an organisation, so that its formation may be undertaken from all aspects. In view of the pressing importance of the question, we, on our part, take the liberty of submitting to the comrades a skeleton plan to be developed in greater detail in *a pamphlet now in preparation for print*.[8]

In our opinion, the starting-point of our activities, the first step towards creating the desired organisation, or, let us say, the main thread which, if followed, would enable us steadily to develop, deepen, and extend that organisation, should be the founding of an All-Russian political newspaper. A newspaper is what we most of all need; without it we cannot conduct that systematic, all-round propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle, which is the chief and permanent task of Social-Democracy in general and, in particular, the pressing task of the moment, when interest in politics and in questions of socialism has been aroused among the broadest strata of the population. Never has the need been felt so acutely as today for reinforcing dispersed agitation in the form of individual action, local leaflets, pamphlets, etc., by means of generalised and systematic agitation that can only be conducted with the aid of the periodical press. It may be said without exaggeration that the frequency and regularity with which a newspaper is printed (and distributed) can serve as a precise criterion of how well this cardinal and most essential sector of our militant activities is built up. Furthermore, our newspaper must be All-Russian. If we fail, and as long as we fail, to combine our efforts to influence the people and the government by means of the printed word, it will be utopian to think of combining other means, more complex, more difficult, but also more decisive, for exerting influence. Our movement suffers in the first place, ideologically, as well as in practical and organisational respects, from its state of fragmentation, from the almost complete immersion of the overwhelming majority of Social-Democrats in local work, which narrows their outlook, the scope of their activities, and their skill in the maintenance of secrecy and their preparedness. It is precisely in this state of fragmentation that one must look for the deepest roots of the instability and the waverings noted above. The *first* step towards eliminating this short-coming, towards transforming divers local movements into a single, All-Russian movement, must be the founding of an All-Russian newspaper. Lastly, what we need is definitely a *political* newspaper. Without a political organ, a political movement deserving that name is inconceivable in the Europe of today. Without such a newspaper we cannot possibly fulfill our task—that of concentrating all the elements of political discontent and protest, of vitalising thereby the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. We have taken the first step, we have aroused in the working class a passion for "economic", factory exposures; we must now take the next step, that of arousing in every section of the population that is at all politically conscious a passion for *political*exposure. We must not be discouraged by the fact that the voice of political exposure is today so feeble, timid, and infrequent. This is not because of a wholesale submission to police despotism, but because those who are able and ready to make exposures have no tribune from which to speak, no eager and encouraging audience, they do not see anywhere among the people that force to which it would be worth while directing their complaint against the "omnipotent" Russian Government. But today all this is rapidly changing. There is such a force—it is the revolutionary proletariat, which has demonstrated its readiness, not only to listen to and support the summons to political struggle, but boldly to engage in battle. We are now in a position to provide a tribune for the nationwide exposure of the tsarist government, and it is our duty to do this. That tribune must be a Social-Democratic newspaper. The Russian working class, as distinct from the other classes and strata of Russian society, displays a constant interest in political knowledge and manifests a constant and extensive demand (not only in periods of intensive unrest) for illegal literature. When such a mass demand is evident, when the training of

experienced revolutionary leaders has already begun, and when the concentration of the working class makes it virtual master in the working-class districts of the big cities and in the factory settlements and communities, it is quite feasible for the proletariat to found a political newspaper. Through the proletariat the newspaper will reach the urban petty bourgeoisie, the rural handicraftsmen, and the peasants, thereby becoming a real people's political newspaper.

The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser. In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organised labour. With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organisation will naturally lake shape that will engage, not only in local activities, but in regular general work, and will train its members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata of the population, and develop effective means for the revolutionary party to influence these events. The mere technical task of regularly supplying the newspaper with copy and of promoting regular distribution will necessitate a network of local agents of the united party, who will maintain constant contact with one another, know the general state of affairs, get accustomed to performing regularly their detailed functions in the All-Russian work, and test their strength in the organisation of various revolutionary actions. This network of agents[1] will form the skeleton of precisely the kind of organisation we need—one that is sufficiently large to embrace the whole country; sufficiently broad and many-sided to effect a strict and detailed division of labour; sufficiently well tempered to be able to conduct steadily *its own* work under any circumstances, at all "sudden turns", and in face of all contingencies; sufficiently flexible to be able, on the one hand, to avoid an open battle against an overwhelming enemy, when the enemy has concentrated all his forces at one spot, and yet, on the other, to take advantage of his unwieldiness and to attack him when and where he least expects it. Today we are faced with the relatively easy task of supporting student demonstrations in the streets of big cities; tomorrow we may, perhaps, have the more difficult task of supporting, for example, the unemployed movement in some particular area, and the day after to be at our posts in order to play a revolutionary part in a peasant uprising. Today we must take advantage of the tense political situation arising out of the government's campaign against the Zemstvo; tomorrow we may have to support popular indignation against some tsarist bashi-bazouk on the rampage and help, by means of boycott, indictment, demonstrations, etc., to make things so hot for him as to force him into open retreat. Such a degree of combat readiness can be developed only through the constant activity of regular troops. If we join forces to produce a common newspaper, this work will train and bring into the foreground, not only the most skillful propagandists, but the most capable organisers, the most talented political party leaders capable, at the right moment, of releasing the slogan for the decisive struggle and of taking the lead in that struggle.

In conclusion, a few words to avoid possible misunderstanding. We have spoken continuously of systematic, planned preparation, yet it is by no means our intention to imply that the autocracy can be overthrown only by a regular siege or by organised

assault. Such a view would be absurd and doctrinaire. On the contrary, it is quite possible, and historically much more probable, that the autocracy will collapse under the impact of one of the spontaneous outbursts or unforeseen political complications which constantly threaten it from all sides. But no political party that wishes to avoid adventurous gambles can base its activities on the anticipation of such outbursts and complications. We must go our own way, and we must steadfastly carry on our regular work, and the less our reliance on the unexpected, the less the chance of our being caught unawares by any "historic turns".

Notes

[1] It will be understood, of course, that these agents could work successfully only in the closest contact with the local committees (groups, study circles) of our Party. In general, the entire plan we project can, of course, be implemented only with the most active support of the committees which have on repeated occasions attempted to unite the Party and which, we are sure, will achieve this unification—if not today, then tomorrow, if not in one way, then in another. —*Lenin*

[2] *"Where To Begin"* was published in *Iskra* and reissued by local Social-Democratic organisations as a separate pamphlet. The Siberian Social-Democratic League printed 5,000 copies of the pamphlet and distributed it throughout Siberia. The pamphlet was also distributed in Samara, Tambov, Nizhni-Novgorod, and other Russian cities.

[3] *Rabocheye Dyelo* (*The Workers' Cause*)—a journal with "Economist" views, organ of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad. It appeared irregularly and was published in Geneva from April 1899 to February 1902 under the editorship of B. N. Krichevsky, A. S. Martynov, and V. P. Ivanshin. Altogether 12 numbers appeared in nine issues.

Lenin criticised the views of the *Rabocheye Dyelo* group in his *What Is To Be Done?* (see present volume, pp. 347-529).

[4] "*Listok*" *Rabochevo Dyela* (*Rabocheye Dyelo Supplement)—of* which eight numbers were issued in Geneva, at irregular intervals, between June 1900 and July 1901.

[5] *Rabochaya Mysl* (*Workers' Thought*)—an "Economist" newspaper, organ of the Union of Russian Social-Democrats Abroad, published from October 1897 to December 1902. Altogether 16 issues appeared: numbers 3 to 11 and number 16 were published in Berlin, the remaining numbers in St. Petersburg. It was edited by K. M. Takhtarev and others.

Lenin characterised the paper's views as a Russian variety of international opportunism arid criticised them in a number of his articles published in *Iskra* and in other works including *What Is To Be Done?*

[6] The reference is to the article "The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement", which was published as the leading article in *Iskra*, No. 1, December 1900 (see present edition, Vol. 4, pp. 366-71).

Iskra (*The Spark*)—the first All-Russian illegal Marxist news paper, founded by Lenin in 1900. The foundation of a militant organ of revolutionary Marxism was the main task confronting Russian Social-Democrats at the time.

Since the publication of a revolutionary newspaper in Russia was impossible, owing to police persecution, Lenin, while still in exile in Siberia, worked out all the details of a plan to publish the paper abroad. When his term of exile ended in January 1900, be immediately began to put his plan into effect. In February, he conducted negotiations with Vera Zasulich, who had come illegally to St. Petersburg from abroad, on the participation of the Emancipation of Labour group in the publication of an All-Russian Marxist newspaper. The so-called Pskov Conference was held in April, with V. I. Lenin, L. Martov (Y. o. Tsederbaum), A. N. Potresov, S. I. Radchenko, and the "legal Marxists" (P. B. Struve and M. I. Tugan-Baranovsky) participating. The conference heard and discussed Lenin's draft editorial declaration on the programme and the aims of the All-Russian newspaper (*Iskra*) and the scientific and political magazine (*Zarya)*. Lenin visited a number of Russian cities—St. Petersburg, Riga, Pskov, Nizhni Novgorod, Ufa, and Samara—establishing contact with Social- Democratic groups and individual Social-Democrats and obtaining their support for *Iskra*. In August, when Lenin arrived in Switzerland, he and Potresov held a conference with the Emancipation of Labour group on the programme and the aims of the newspaper and the magazine, on possible contributors, on the composition of Editorial Board, and on the problem of residence. For an account of the founding of *Iskra* see the article "How the 'Spark' was Nearly Extinguished" (see present edition, Vol. 4, pp. 333-49).

The first issue of Lenin's *Iskra* was published in Leipzig in December 1900; the ensuing issues were published in Munich; from July 1902 it was published in London; and from the spring of 1903 in Geneva.

The Editorial Board consisted of V. I. Lenin, G. V. Plekhanov, L. Martov, P. B. Axelrod, A. N. Potresov, and V. I. Zasulich. The first secretary of the Editorial Board was I. G. Smidovich-Leman. From the spring of 1901 the post was taken over by N. K. Krupskaya, who was also in charge of all correspondence between *Iskra* and Russian Social-Democratic organisations. Lenin was actually Editor-in-Chief

and the leading figure in *Iskra*. He published his articles on all important questions of Party organisation and the class struggle of the proletariat in Russia and dealt with the most important events in world affairs.

Iskra became, as Lenin had planned, a rallying centre for the Party forces, a centre for the training of leading Party workers. In a number of Russian cities (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Samara, and others) groups and committees of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (P1.S.D.L.P.) were organised along Lenin's *Iskra* line. *Iskra* organisations sprang up and worked under the direct leadership of Lenin's disciples and comrades-in-arms: = N. E. Bauman, I. V. Babusbkin, S. I. Gusev, M. I. Kalinin, G. M. Krzhizhanovsky, and others. The newspaper played a decisive role in the struggle for the Marxist Party, in the defeat of the "Economists", and in the unification of the dispersed Social-Democratic study circles.

On the initiative and with the direct participation of Lenin, the Editorial Board drew up a draft programme of the Party (published in*Iskra*, No. 21) and prepared the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P., which was held in July and August 1903. By the time the Congress was convened the majority of the local Social-Democratic organisations in Russia had joined forces with *Iskra*, approved its programme, organisational plan, and tactical line, and accepted it as their leading organ. By a special resolution, which rioted the exceptional role played by *Iskra* in the struggle to build the Party, the Congress adopted the news paper as the central organ of the R.S.D.L.P. and approved an editorial board consisting of Lenin, Plekhanov, and Martov. Despite the decision of the Congress, Martov refused to participate, and Nos. 46 to 51 were edited by Lenin and Plekhanov. Later Plekhanov went over to the Menshevik position and demanded that, all the old Menshevik editors, notwithstanding their rejection by the Congress, be placed on the Editorial Board. Lenin could not agree to this, and on October 19 (November 1, new style), 1903, he left the *Iskra* Editorial Board to strengthen his position in the Central Committee and from there to conduct a struggle against the Menshevik opportunists. Issue No. 52 of *Iskra* was edited by Plekhanov alone. On November 13 (26), 1903, Plekhanov, on his own initiative and in violation of the will of the Congress, co-opted all the old Menshevik editors on to the Editorial Board. Beginning with issue No. 52, the Mensheviks turned *Iskra* into their own, opportunist, organ.

[7] This passage refers to the mass revolutionary actions of students and workers— political demonstrations, meetings, strikes— that took place in February and March 1901, in St.

Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, Kazan, Yaroslavl, Warsaw, Belostok, Tomsk, Odessa, and other cities in Russia.

The student movement of 1900-01, which began with academic demands, acquired the character of revolutionary action against the reactionary policy of the autocracy; it was supported by the advanced workers and it met with a response among all strata of Russian society. The direct cause of the demonstrations and strikes in February and March 1901, was the drafting of 183 Kiev University students into the army as a punitive act for their participation in a students' meeting (see present edition, Vol. 4, pp. 414-19). The government launched a furious attack on participants in the revolutionary actions; the police and the Cossacks dispersed demonstrations and assaulted the participants; hundreds of students were arrested and expelled from colleges and universities. On March 4 (17), 1901, the demonstration in the square in front of the Kazan Cathedral, in St. Petersburg, was dispersed with particular brutality. The February-March events were evidence of the revolutionary upsurge in Russia; the participation of workers in the movement under political slogans was of tremendous importance.

[8] The reference is to Lenin's work *What Is To Be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (see present volume, pp. 347-529). p. 20

Rosa Luxemburg

Organizational Questions

of the Russian Social Democracy

I

An unprecedented task in the history of the socialist movement has fallen to the lot of the Russian Social Democracy. It is the task of deciding on what is the best socialist tactical policy in a country where absolute monarchy is still dominant. It is a mistake to draw a rigid parallel between the present Russian situation and that which existed in Germany during the years 1879-90, when Bismarck's antisocialist laws were in force. The two have one thing in common – police rule. Otherwise they are in no way comparable.

The obstacles offered to the socialist movement by the absence of democratic liberties are of relatively secondary importance. Even in Russia, the people's movement

has succeeded in overcoming the barriers set up by the state. The people have found themselves a "constitution" (though a rather precarious one) in street disorders. Persevering in this course, the Russian people will in time attain complete victory over the autocracy.

The principal difficulty faced by socialist activity in Russia results from the fact that in that country the domination of the bourgeoisie is veiled by absolutist force. This gives socialist propaganda an abstract character, while immediate political agitation takes on a democratic-revolutionary guise.

Bismarck's antisocialist laws put our movement out of constitutional bounds in a highly developed bourgeois society, where class antagonisms had already reached their full bloom in parliamentary contests. (Here, by the way, lay the absurdity of Bismarck's scheme). The situation is quite different in Russia. The problem there is how to create a Social Democratic movement at a time when the state is not yet in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

The circumstance has an influence on agitation, on the manner of transplanting socialist doctrine to Russian soil. It also bears in a peculiar and direct way on the question of *party organization*.

Under ordinary conditions – that is, where the political domination of the bourgeoisie has preceded the socialist movement – the bourgeoisie itself instills in the working class the rudiments of political solidarity. At this stage, declares the Communist Manifesto, the unification of the workers is not yet the result of their own aspiration to unity but comes as a result of the activity of the bourgeoisie, "which, in order to attain its own political ends, is compelled to set the proletariat in motion ..."

In Russia, however, the Social Democracy must make up by its own efforts an entire historic period. It must lead the Russian proletarians from their present "atomized" condition, which prolongs the autocratic regime, to a class organization that would help them to become aware of their historic objectives and prepare them to struggle to achieve those objectives.

The Russian socialists are obliged to undertake the building of such an organization without the benefit of such an organization without the benefit of the formal guarantees commonly found under a bourgeois-democratic setup. They do not dispose of the political raw material that in other countries is supplied by bourgeois society itself. Like God Almighty they must have this organization arise out of the void, so to speak.

How to effect a transition from the type of organization characteristic of the preparatory stage of the socialist movement – usually featured by disconnected local groups and clubs, with propaganda as a principal activity – to the unity of a large, national body, suitable for concerted political action over the entire vast territory ruled by the Russian state? That is the specific problem which the Russian Social Democracy has mulled over for some time.

Autonomy and isolation are the most pronounced characteristics of the old organizational type. It is, therefore, understandable why the slogan of persons who want to see an inclusive national organization should be "Centralism!"

At the Party Congress, it became evident that the term "centralism" does not completely cover the question of organization for the Russian Social Democracy. Once again we have learned that no rigid formula can furnish the solution of any problem in the social movement.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward, written by Lenin, an outstanding member of the **Iskra** group, is a methodical exposition of the ideas of the ultra-centralist tendency in the Russian movement. The viewpoint presented with incomparable vigor and logic in this book, is that of pitiless centralism. Laid down as principles are: 1. The necessity of selecting, and constituting as a separate corps, all the active revolutionists, as distinguished from the unorganized, though revolutionary, mass surrounding this elite.

Lenin's thesis is that the party Central Committee should have the privilege of naming all the local committees of the party. It should have the right to appoint the effective organs of all local bodies from Geneva to Liege, from Tomsk to Irkutsk. It should also have the right to impose on all of them its own ready-made rules of party conduct. It should have the right to rule without appeal on such questions as the dissolution and reconstitution of local organizations. This way, the Central Committee could determine, to suit itself, the composition of the highest party organs. The Central Committee would be the only thinking element in the party. All other groupings would be its executive limbs.

Lenin reasons that the combination of the socialist mass movement with such a rigorously centralized type of organization is a specific principle of revolutionary Marxism. To support this thesis, he advances a series of arguments, with which we shall deal below.

Generally speaking it is undeniable that a strong tendency toward centralization is inherent in the Social Democratic movement. This tendency springs from the economic makeup of capitalism which is essentially a centralizing factor. The Social Democratic movement carries on its activity inside the large bourgeois city. Its mission is to represent, within the boundaries of the national state, the class interests of the proletariat, and to oppose those common interests to all local and group interests.

Therefore, the Social Democracy is, as a rule, hostile to any manifestation of localism or federalism. It strives to unite all workers and all worker organizations in a single party, no matter what national, religious, or occupational differences may exist among them. The Social Democracy abandons this principle and gives way to federalism only under exceptional conditions, as in the case of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

It is clear that the Russian Social Democracy should not organize itself as a federative conglomerate of many national groups. It must rather become a single party for he entire empire. However, that is not really the question considered here. What we are considering is the degree of centralization necessary inside the unified, single Russian party in view of the peculiar conditions under which it has to function.

Looking at the matter from the angle of the formal tasks of the Social Democracy, in its capacity as a party of class struggle, it appears at first that the power and energy of the party are directly dependent on the possibility of centralizing the party. However, these formal tasks apply to all active parties. In the case of the Social Democracy, they are less important than is the influence of historic conditions.

The Social Democratic movement is the first in the history of class societies which reckons, in all its phases and through its entire course, on the organization and the direct, independent action of the masses.

Because of this, the Social Democracy creates an organizational type that is entirely different from those common to earlier revolutionary movements, such as those of the Jacobins and the adherents of Blanqui.

Lenin seems to slight this fact when he presents in his book (page 140) the opinion that the revolutionary Social Democrat is nothing else than a "Jacobin indissolubly joined to the organization of the proletariat, which has become conscious of its class interests."

For Lenin, the difference between the Social Democracy and Blanquism is reduced to the observation that in place of a handful of conspirators we have a class-conscious proletariat. He forgets that this difference implies a complete revision of our ideas on organization and, therefore, an entirely different conception of centralism and the relations existing between the party and the struggle itself.

Blanquism did not count on the direct action of the working class. It, therefore, did not need to organize the people for the revolution. The people were expected to play their part only at the moment of revolution. Preparation for the revolution concerned only the little group of revolutionists armed for the coup. Indeed, to assure the success of the revolutionary conspiracy, it was considered wiser to keep the mass at some distance from the conspirators. Such a relationship could be conceived by the Blanquists only because there was no close contact between the conspiratorial activity of their organization and the daily struggle of the popular masses.

The tactics and concrete tasks of the Blanquist revolutionists had little connection with the elementary class struggle. They were freely improvised. They could, therefore, be decided on in advance and took the form of a ready-made plan. In consequence of this, ordinary members of the organization became simple executive organs, carrying out the orders of a will fixed beforehand, and outside of their particular sphere of activity. They became the instruments of a Central Committee. Here we have the second peculiarity of conspiratorial centralism – the absolute and blind submission of the party sections to the will of the center, and the extension of this authority to all parts of the organization.

However, Social Democratic activity is carried on under radically different conditions. It arises historically out of the elementary class struggle. It spreads and develops in accordance with the following dialectical contradiction. The proletarian army is recruited and becomes aware of its objectives in the course of the struggle itself. The activity of the party organization, the growth of the proletarians' awareness of the objectives of the struggle and the struggle itself, are not different things separated chronologically and mechanically. They are only different aspects of the same struggle, there do not exist for the Social Democracy detailed sets of tactics which a Central Committee can teach the party membership in the same way as troops are instructed in their training camps. Furthermore, the range of influence of the socialist party is constantly fluctuating with the ups and downs of the struggle in the course of which the organization is created and grows.

For this reason Social Democratic centralism cannot be based on the mechanical subordination and blind obedience of the party membership to the leading party center. For this reason, the Social Democratic movement cannot allow the erection of an air-tight partition between the class-conscious nucleus of the proletariat already in the party and its immediate popular environment, the nonparty sections of the proletariat.

Now the two principles on which Lenin's centralism rests are precisely these:

1. The blind subordination, in the smallest detail, of all party organs to the party center which alone thinks, guides, and decides for all.

2. The rigorous separation of the organized nucleus of revolutionaries from its social-revolutionary surroundings.

Such centralism is a mechanical transposition of the organizational principles of Blanquism into the mass movement of the socialist working class.

In accordance with this view, Lenin defines his "revolutionary Social Democrat" as a "Jacobin joined to the organization of the proletariat, which has become conscious of its class interests."

The fact is that the Social Democracy is not *joined* to the organization of the proletariat. It is itself the proletariat. And because of this, Social Democratic centralism is essentially different from Blanquist centralism. It can only be the concentrated will of the individuals and groups representative of the working class. It is, so to speak, the "self-centralism" of the advanced sectors of the proletariat. It is the rule of the majority within its own party.

The indispensable conditions for the realization of Social Democratic centralism are:

1. The existence of a large contingent of workers educated in the class struggle.
2. The possibility for the workers to develop their own political activity through direct influence on public life, in a party press, and public congresses, etc.

These conditions are not yet fully formed in Russia. The first – a proletarian vanguard, conscious of its class interests and capable of self-direction in political activity – is only now emerging in Russia. All efforts of socialist agitation and organization should aim to hasten the formation of such a vanguard. The second condition can be had only under a regime of political liberty.

With these conclusions, Lenin disagrees violently. He is convinced that all the conditions necessary for the formation of a powerful and centralized party already exist in Russia. He declares that, "it is no longer the proletarians but certain intellecutuals in our party who need to be educated in the matters of organization and discipline," (page 145). He glorifies the educative influence of the factory, which, he says, accustoms the proletariat to "discipline and organization," (page 147).

Saying all this, Lenin seems to demonstrate again that his conception of socialist organization is quite mechanistic. The discipline Lenin has in mind is being implanted in the working class not only by the factory but also by the military and the existing state bureaucracy – by the entire mechanism of the centralized bourgeois state.

We misuse words and we practice self-deception when we apply the same term – discipline – to such dissimilar notions as: 1. the absence of thought and will in a body with a thousand automatically moving hands and legs, and 2. the spontaneous coordination of the conscious, political acts of a body of men. What is there in common between the regulated docility of an oppressed class and the self-discipline and organization of a class struggling for its emancipation?

The self-discipline of the Social Democracy is not merely the replacement of the authority of bourgeois rulers with the authority of a socialist central committee. The working class will acquire the sense of the new discipline, the freely assumed self-discipline of the Social Democracy, not as a result of the discipline imposed on it by the capitalist state, but by extirpating, to the last root, its old habits of obedience and servility.

Centralism in the socialist sense is not an absolute thing applicable to any phase whatsoever of the labor movement. It is a *tendency*, which becomes real in proportion to

the development and political training acquired by the working masses in the course of their struggle.

No doubt, the absence of the conditions necessary for the complete realization of this kind of centralism in the Russian movement presents a formidable obstacle.

It is a mistake to believe that it is possible to substitute "provisionally" the absolute power of a Central Committee (acting somehow by "tacit delegation") for the yet unrealizable rule of the majority of conscious workers in the party, and in this way replace the open control of the working masses over the party organs with the reverse control by the Central Committee over the revolutionary proletariat.

The history of the Russian labor movement suggests the doubtful value of such centralism. An all-powerful center, invested, as Lenin would have it, with the unlimited right to control and intervene, would be an absurdity if its authority applied only to technical questions, such as the administration of funds, the distribution of tasks among propagandists and agitators, the transportation and circulation of printed matter. The political purpose of an organ having such great powers only if those powers apply to the elaboration of a uniform plan of action, if the central organ assumes the initiative of a vast revolutionary act.

But what has been the experience of the Russian socialist movement up to now? The most important and fruitful changes in its tactical policy during the last ten years have not been the inventions of several leaders and even less so of any central organizational organs. They have always been the spontaneous product of the movement in ferment. This was true during the first stage of the proletarian movement in Russia, which began with the spontaneous general strike of St. Petersburg in 1896, an event that marks the inception of an epoch of economic struggle by the Russian working people. It was no less true during the following period, introduced by the spontaneous street demonstrations of St. Petersburg students in March, 1901. The general strike of Rostov-on-Don, in 1903, marking the next great tactical turn in the Russian proletarian movement, was also a spontaneous act. "All by itself," the strike expanded into political demonstrations, street agitation, great outdoor meetings, which the most optimistic revolutionist would not have dreamed of several years before.

Our cause made great gains in these events. However, the initiative and conscious leadership of the Social Democratic organizations played an insignificant role in this development. It is true that these organizations were not specifically prepared for such happenings. However, the unimportant part played by the revolutionists cannot be explained by this fact. Neither can it be attributed to the absence of an all-powerful central party apparatus similar to what is asked for by Lenin. The existence of such a guiding center would have probably increased the disorder of the local committees by emphasizing the difference between the eager attack of the mass and the prudent position of the Social Democracy. The same phenomenon – the insignificant part played by the initiative of central party organs in the elaboration of actual tactical policy – can be observed today in Germany and other countries. In general, the tactical policy of the Social Democracy is not something that may be "invented." It is the product of a series of great creative acts of the often spontaneous class struggle seeking its way forward.

The unconscious comes before the conscious. The logic of the historic process comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process. The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role. Experience shows that every time the labor movement wins new

terrain those organs work it to the utmost. They transform it at the same time into a kind of bastion, which holds up advance on a wider scale.

The present tactical policy of the German Social Democracy has won universal esteem because it is supple as well as firm. This is a sign of the fine adaptation of the party, in the smallest detail of its everyday activity, to the conditions of a parliamentary regime. The party has made a methodical study of all the resources of this terrain. It knows how to utilize them without modifying its principles.

However, the very perfection of this adaptation is already closing vaster horizons to our party. There is a tendency in the party to regard parliamentary tactics as the immutable and specific tactics of socialist activity. People refuse, for example, to consider the possibility (posed by Parvus) of changing our tactical policy in case general suffrage is abolished in Germany, an eventuality not considered entirely improbable by the German Social Democracy.

Such inertia is due, in a large degree, to the fact that it is very inconvenient to define, within the vacuum of abstract hypotheses, the lines and forms of still nonexistent political situations. Evidently, the important thing for the Social Democracy is not the preparation of a set of directives all ready for future policy. It is important: 1. to encourage a correct historic appreciation of the forms of struggle corresponding to the given situations, and 2. to maintain an understanding of the relativity of the current phase and the inevitable increase of revolutionary tension as the final goal of class struggle is approached.

Granting, as Lenin wants, such absolute powers of a negative character to the top organ of the party, we strengthen, to a dangerous extent, the conservatism inherent in such an organ. If the tactics of the socialist party are not to be the creation of a Central Committee but of the whole party, or, still better, of the whole labor movement, then it is clear that the party sections and federations need the liberty of action which alone will permit them to develop their revolutionary initiative and to utilize all the resources of the situation. The ultra-centralism asked by Lenin is full of the sterile spirit of the overseer. It is not a positive and creative spirit. *Lenin's concern is not so much to make the activity of the party more fruitful as to control the party – to narrow the movement rather than to develop it, to bind rather than to unify it.*

In the present situation, such an experiment would be doubly dangerous to the Russian Social Democracy. It stands on the eve of decisive battles against tsarism. It is about to enter, or has already entered, on a period of intensified creative activity, during which it will broaden (as is usual in a revolutionary period) its sphere of influence and will advance spontaneously by leaps and bounds. To attempt to bind the initiative of the party at this moment, to surround it with a network of barbed wire, is to render it incapable of accomplishing the tremendous task of the hour.

The general ideas we have presented on the question of socialist centralism are not by themselves sufficient for the formulation of a constitutional plan suiting the Russian party. In the final instance, a statute of this kind can only be determined by the conditions under which the activity of the organization takes place in a given epoch. The question of the moment in Russia is how to set in motion a large proletarian organization. No constitutional project can claim infallibility. It must prove itself in fire.

But from our general conception of the nature of Social Democratic organization, we feel justified in deducing that its spirit requires – especially at the inception of the mass party – the co-ordination and unification of the movement and not its rigid

submission to a set of regulations. If the party possesses the gift of political mobility, complemented by unflinching loyalty to principles and concern for unity, we can rest assured that any defects in the party constitution will be corrected in practice. For us, it is not the letter, but the living spirit carried into the organization by the membership that decides the value of this or that organizational form.

II

So far we have examined the problem of centralism from the viewpoint of the general principles of the Social Democracy, and to some extent, in the light of conditions peculiar to Russia. However, the military ultra-centralism cried up by Lenin and his friends is not the product of accidental differences of opinion. It is said to be related to a campaign against opportunism which Lenin has carried to the smallest organizational detail.

"It is important," says Lenin (page 52), "to forge a more or less effective weapon against opportunism." He believes that opportunism springs specifically from the characteristic leaning of intellectuals to decentralization and disorganization, from their aversion for strict discipline and "bureaucracy," which is, however, necessary for the functioning of the party.

Lenin says that intellectuals remain individualists and tend to anarchism even after they have joined the socialist movement. According to him, it is only among intellectuals that we can note a repugnance for the absolute authority of a Central Committee. The authentic proletarian, Lenin suggests, finds by reason of his class instinct a kind of voluptuous pleasure in abandoning himself to the clutch of firm leadership and pitiless discipline. "To oppose bureaucracy to democracy," writes Lenin, "is to contrast the organizational principle of revolutionary Social Democracy to the methods of opportunistic organization," (page 151).

He declares that a similar conflict between centralizing and autonomist tendencies is taking place in all countries where reformism and revolutionary socialism meet face to face. He points in particular to the recent controversy in the German Social Democracy on the question of the degree of freedom of action to be allowed by the Party to socialist representatives in legislative assemblies.

Let us examine the parallels drawn by Lenin.

First, it is important to point out that the glorification of the supposed genius of proletarians in the matter of socialist organization and a general distrust of intellectuals as such are not necessarily signs of "revolutionary Marxist" mentality. It is very easy to demonstrate that such arguments are themselves an expression of opportunism.

Antagonism between purely proletarian elements and the nonproletarian intellectuals in the labor movement is raised as an ideological issue by the following trends: the semianarchism of the French syndicalists, whose watchword is "Beware of the politician!"; English trade-unionism, full of mistrust of the "socialist visionaries"; and, if our information is correct, the "pure economism," represented a short while ago within the Russian Social Democracy by **Rabochaya Mysl** (**Labor Thought**), which was printed secretly in St. Petersburg.

In most socialist parties in Western Europe there is undoubtedly a connection between opportunism and the "intellectuals," as well as between opportunism and decentralizing tendencies within the labor movement.

But nothing is more contrary to the historic-dialectic method of Marxist thought than to separate social phenomena from their historic soil and to present these phenomena as abstract formulas having an absolute, general application.

Reasoning abstractly, we may say that the "intellectual," a social element which has emerged out of the bourgeoisie and is therefore alien to the proletariat, enters the socialist movement not because of his natural class inclinations but in spite of them. For this reason, he is more liable to opportunist aberrations than the proletarian. The latter, we say, can be expected to find a definite revolutionary point of support in his class interests as long as he does not leave his original environment, the laboring mass. But the concrete form assumed by this inclination of the intellectual toward opportunism and, above all, the manner in which this tendency expresses itself in organizational questions depend every time on his given social milieu.

Bourgeois parliamentarism is the definite social base of the phenomenon observed by Lenin in the German, French, and Italian socialist movements. This parliamentarism is the breeding place of all opportunist tendencies now existing in Western Social Democracy.

The kind of parliamentarism we now have in France, Italy, and Germany provides the soil for such illusions of current opportunism as overvaluation of social reforms, class and party collaboration, the hope of pacific development towards socialism etc. It does so by placing intellectuals, acting in the capacity of parliamentarians, above the proletariat and by separating intellectuals from proletarians inside the socialist movement itself. With the growth of the labor movement, parliamentarism becomes a springboard for political careerists. That is why so many ambitious failures from the bourgeoisie flock to the banners of socialist parties. Another source of contemporary opportunism is the considerable material means and influence of the large Social Democratic organizations.

The party acts as a bulwark protecting the class movement against digressions in the direction of more bourgeois parliamentarism. To triumph, these tendencies must destroy the bulwark. They must dissolve the active, class-conscious sector of the proletariat in the amorphous mass of an "electorate."

That is how the "autonomist" and decentralizing tendencies arise in our Social Democratic parties. We notice that these tendencies suit definite political ends. They cannot be explained, as Lenin attempts, by referring to the intellectual's psychology, to his supposedly innate instability of character. They can only be explained by considering the needs of the bourgeois parliamentary politician, that is, by opportunist politics.

The situation is quite different in tsarist Russia. Opportunism in the Russian labor movement is, generally speaking, not the by-product of Social Democratic strength or of the decomposition of the bourgeoisie. It is the product of the backward political condition of Russian society.

The milieu where intellectuals are recruited for socialism in Russia is much more declassed and by far less bourgeois than in Western Europe. Added to the immaturity of the Russian proletarian movement, this circumstance is an influence for wide theoretic wandering, which ranges from the complete negation of the political aspect of the labor movement to the unqualified belief in the effectiveness of isolated terrorist acts, or even total political indifference sought in the swamps of liberalism and Kantian idealism.

However, the intellectual within the Russian Social Democratic movement can only be attracted to an act of disorganization. It is contrary to the general outlook of he

Russian intellectual's milieu. There is no bourgeois parliament in Russia to favor this tendency.

The Western intellectual who professes at this moment the "cult of the ego" and colors even his socialist yearnings with an aristocratic morale, is not the representative of the bourgeois intelligentsia "in general." He represents only a certain phase of social development. He is the product of bourgeois decadence.

The *Narodniki* ("Populists") of 1875 called on the Russian intelligentsia to lose themselves in the peasant mass. The ultra-civilized followers of Tolstoi speak today of escape to the life of the "simple folk." Similarly, the partisans of "pure economism" in the Russian Social Democracy want us to bow down before the "calloused hand" of labor.

If instead of mechanically applying to Russia formulae elaborated in Western Europe, we approach the problem of organization from the angle of conditions specific to Russia, we arrive at conclusions that are diametrically opposed to Lenin's.

To attribute to opportunism an invariable preference for a definite form of organization, that is, decentralization, is to miss the essence of opportunism.

On the question of organization, or any other question, opportunism knows only one principle: the absence of principle. Opportunism chooses its means of action with the aim of suiting the given circumstances at hand, provided these means appear to lead toward the ends in view.

If, like Lenin, we define opportunism as the tendency that paralyzes the independent revolutionary movement of the working class and transforms it into an instrument of ambitious bourgeois intellectuals, we must also recognize that in the initial stage of a labor movement this end is more easily attained as a result of rigorous centralization rather than by decentralization. It is by extreme centralization that a young, uneducated proletarian movement can be most completely handed over to the intellectual leaders staffing a Central Committee.

Also in Germany, at the start of the Social Democratic movement, and before the emergence of a solid nucleus of conscious proletarians and a tactical policy based on experience, partisans of the two opposite types of organization faced each other in argument. The "General Association of German Workers," founded by Lasalle, stood for extreme centralization. [*Allgemeine Deutsche Arbeiterverein,* organized on May 23, 1863 – Ed] The principle of autonomism was supported by the party which was organized at the Eisenach Congress with the collaboration of W. Liebknecht and A. Bebel.

The tactical policy of the "Eisenachers" was quite confused. Yet they contributed vastly more to the awakening of class-consciousness of the German masses than the Lassalleans. Very early the workers played a preponderant role in that party (as was demonstrated by the number of worker publications in the provinces), and there was a rapid extension of the range of the movement. At the same time, the Lassalleans, in spite of all their experiments with "dictators," led their faithful from one misadventure to another.

In general, it is rigorous, despotic centralism that is preferred by opportunist intellectuals at a time when the revolutionary elements among the workers still lack cohesion and the movement is groping its way, as is the case now in Russia. In a later phase, under a parliamentary regime and in connection with a strong labor party, the

opportunist tendencies of the intellectuals express themselves in an inclination toward "decentralization."

If we assume the viewpoint claimed as his own by Lenin and we fear the influence of intellectuals in the proletarian movement, we can conceive of no greater danger to the Russian party than Lenin's plan of organization. *Nothing will more surely enslave a young labor movement to an intellectual elite hungry for power than this bureaucratic straightjacket, which will immobilize the movement and turn it into an automaton manipulated by a Central Committee.* On the other hand there is no more effective guarantee against opportunist intrigue and personal ambition than the independent revolutionary action of the proletariat, as a result of which the workers acquire the sense of political responsibility and self-reliance.

What is today only a phantom haunting Lenin's imagination may become reality tomorrow.

Let us not forget that the revolution soon to break out in Russia will be a bourgeois and not a proletarian revolution. This modifies radically all the conditions of socialist struggle. The Russian intellectuals, too, will rapidly become imbued with bourgeois ideology. The Social Democracy is at present the only guide of the Russian proletariat. But on the day after the revolution, we shall see the bourgeoisie and above all the bourgeois masses as a steppingstone to their domination.

The game of bourgeois demagogues will be made easier if at the present stage, the spontaneous action, initiative, and political sense of the advanced sections of the working class are hindered in their development and restricted by the protectorate of an authoritarian Central Committee.

More important is the fundamental falseness of the idea underlying the plan of unqualified centralism – the idea that the road to opportunism can be barred by means of clauses in the party constitution.

Impressed by recent happenings in the socialist parties of France, Italy, and Germany, the Russian Social Democrats tend to regard opportunism as an alien ingredient, brought into the labor movement by representatives of bourgeois democracy. If that were so, no penalties provided by a party constitution could stop this intrusion. This afflux of nonproletarian recruits to the party of the proletariat is the effect of profound social causes, such as the economic collapse of the petty bourgeoisie, the bankruptcy of bourgeois liberalism, and the degeneration of bourgeois democracy. It is naïve to hope to stop this current by means of a formula written down in a constitution.

A manual of regulations may master the life of a small sect or a private circle. An historic current, however, will pass through the mesh of the most subtly worded paragraph. It is furthermore untrue that to repel the elements pushed toward the socialist movement by the decomposition of bourgeois society means to defend the interests of the working class. The Social Democracy has always contended that it represents not only the class interests of the proletariat but also the progressive aspirations of the whole of contemporary society. It represents the interests of all who are oppressed by bourgeois domination. This must not be understood merely in the sense that all these interests are ideally contained in the socialist program. Historic evolution translates the given proposition into reality. In its capacity as a political party, the Social Democracy becomes the haven of all discontented elements in our society and thus of the entire people, as contrasted to the tiny minority of capitalist masters.

But socialists must always know how to subordinate the anguish, rancor, and hope of this motley aggregation to the supreme goal of the working class. The Social Democracy must enclose the tumult of the nonproletarian protestants against existing society within bounds of the revolutionary action of the proletariat. It must assimilate the elements that come to it.

This is only possible if the Social Democracy already contains a strong, politically educated proletarian nucleus class conscious enough to be able, as up to now in Germany, to pull along in its tow the declassed and petty bourgeois elements that join the party. In that case, greater strictness in the application of the principle of centralization and more severe discipline, specifically formulated in party bylaws, may be an effective safeguard against the opportunist danger. That is how the revolutionary socialist movement in France defended itself against the Jauresist confusion. A modification of the constitution at the German Social Democracy in that direction would be a very timely measure.

But even here we should not think of the party constitution as a weapon that is, somehow, self-sufficient. It can be at most a coercive instrument enforcing the will of the proletarian majority in the party. If this majority is lacking, then the most dire sanctions on paper will be of no avail.

However, the influx of bourgeois elements into the party is far from being the only cause of the opportunist trends that are now raising their heads in the Social Democracy. Another cause is the very nature of socialist activity and the contradictions inherent in it.

The international movement of the proletariat toward its complete emancipation is a process peculiar in the following respect. For the first time in the history of civilization, the people are expressing their will consciously and in opposition to all ruling classes. But this will can only be satisfied beyond the limits of the existing system.

Now the mass can only acquire and strengthen this will in the course of day-to-day struggle against the existing social order – that is, within the limits of capitalist society.

On the one hand, we have the mass; on the other, its historic goal, located outside of existing society. On one had, we have the day-to-day struggle; on the other, the social revolution. Such are the terms of the dialectic contradiction through which the socialist movement makes its way.

It follows that this movement can best advance by tacking betwixt and between the two dangers by which it is constantly being threatened. One is the loss of its mass character; the other, the abandonment of its goal. One is the danger of sinking back to the condition of a sect; the other, the danger of becoming a movement of bourgeois social reform.

That is why it is illusory, and contrary to historic experience, to hope to fix, once and for always, the direction of the revolutionary socialist struggle with the aid of formal means, which are expected to secure the labor movement against all possibilities of opportunist digression.

Marxist theory offers us a reliable instrument enabling us to recognize and combat typical manifestations of opportunism. But the socialist movement is a mass movement. Its perils are not the product of the insidious machinations of individuals and groups. They arise out of unavoidable social conditions. We cannot secure ourselves in advance against all possibilities of opportunist deviation. Such dangers can be overcome only by

the movement itself – certainly with the aid of Marxist theory, but only after the dangers in question have taken tangible form in practice.

Looked at from this angle, opportunism appears to be a product and an inevitable phase of the historic development of the labor movement.

The Russian Social Democracy arose a short while ago. The political conditions under which the proletarian movement is developing in Russia are quite abnormal. In that country, opportunism is to a large extent a by-product of the groping and experimentation of socialist activity seeking to advance over a terrain that resembles no other in Europe.

In view of this, we find most astonishing the claim that it is possible to avoid any possibility of opportunism in the Russian movement by writing down certain words, instead of others, in the party constitution. *Such an attempt to exercise opportunism by means of a scrap of paper may turn out to be extremely harmful – not to opportunism but to the socialist movement.*

Stop the natural pulsation of a living organism, and you weaken it, and you diminish its resistance and combative spirit – in this instance, not only against opportunism but also (and that is certainly of great importance) against the existing social order. The proposed means turn against the end they are supposed to serve.

In Lenin's overanxious desire to establish the guardianship of an omniscient and omnipotent Central Committee in order to protect so promising and vigorous a labor movement against any misstep, we recognize the symptoms of the same subjectivism that has already played more than one trick on socialist thinking in Russia.

It is amusing to note the strange somersaults that the respectable human "ego" has had to perform in recent Russian history. Knocked to the ground, almost reduced to dust, by Russian absolutism, the "ego" takes revenge by turning to revolutionary activity. In the shape of a committee of conspirators, in the name of a nonexistent Will of the People, it seats itself on a kind of throne and proclaims it is all-powerful. [The reference is to the conspiratorial circle which attacked tsarism from 1879 to 1883 by means of terrorist acts and finally assassinated Alexander II. – *Ed.*] But the "object" proves to be the stronger. The knout is triumphant, for tsarist might seems to be the "legitimate" expression of history.

In time we see appear on the scene and even more "legitimate" child of history – the Russian labor movement. For the first time, bases for the formation of a real "people's will" are laid in Russian soil.

But here is the "ego" of the Russian revolutionary again! Pirouetting on its head, it once more proclaims itself to be the all-powerful director of history – this time with the title of His Excellency the Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Russia.

The nimble acrobat fails to perceive that the only "subject" which merits today the role of director is the collective "ego" of the working class. The working class demands the right to make its mistakes and learn the dialectic of history.

Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement are infinitely more fruitful than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee.

Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origins of the Workers' Council Movement

Sergio Bologna on the composition of the working class and the role of the revolutionary party in the German movement for workers' councils at the start of the 20th century.

Structure of the labour force and political class composition in Germany before World War I

A substantial and significant part of the factory-level leadership in the German workers' council movement was made up of highly specialised workers in the engineering industry.

Since this section of workers took on a social and political dimension in 1918, it is legitimate to ask whether it was the structure of German industry pre-World War I that contributed to the predominance of this type of workforce, and whether there was any relationship between these workers' position in production and their political adherence to the workers' council system.

The pre-War German engineering industry had not yet reached a level of concentration and rationalisation to match that in the mining, steel and electrical sectors. It consisted mainly of middle-size establishments employing between 1,000 and 5,000 workers distributed in the traditional centres of German industrialism: Rhineland-Westphalia, Wirttenberg, Saxony, the Berlin region, the Hamburg region, Oldenburg and Bavaria. It was the newest German industrial sector. Its principal products were bicycles, motorcycles, machine tools, office machines, sewing machines, tools and automobiles. Specialisation was not yet very advanced. In fact almost all major manufacturers of bicycles and later motorcycles also produced office machines and sewing machines. Only the German branch of Singer in Hamburg actually began life as purely a producer of sewing machines - and this came about because it was a subsidiary of a US corporation which already had a monopoly in the market. The auto industry had not yet assumed the importance it was to achieve later. (In the United States this happened around 1910-12, but in Germany it only came about in 1924, with Opel). Auto production was carried out on a limited scale in small to medium-size establishments. What did develop very fast, and with its own autonomy, was the industry supplying auxiliary products to the motor industry; this sector was characterised by rapid concentration and rationalisation. It was in this sector, and specifically in the production of ignition equipment, that Robert Bosch made his fortune. In 1913 he already employed 4,700 workers in his plant in Stuttgart and in other smaller minor establishments. This kind of sector - which enabled the German engineering industry to achieve a leading world position prior to World War I, had a particularly skilled labour force. It employed a very large number of specialised technicians; its research and development spending was higher than in other sectors, and it developed an extremely dynamic marketing apparatus. Consequently, wages too were higher. Bosch was the first German employer to introduce the eight-hour working day in 1906, as an employer's concession, and then the free Saturday in 1910. It was at this time that Germany witnessed the development of industrial sectors such as light engineering, precision tools, optics and electromechanics. If we follow the history of the firms engaged in these sectors, we see them making remarkable leaps forward: these are the same firms which imposed on the world market the very high quality characteristic of German products,

thereby enabling them,selves to confront their British and American competitors, who were starting from a more solid financial base. This was due not so much to the entrepreneurial talents of individual German capitalists as to the remarkable professional ability of a skilled labour force working with the most advanced technology, with specialised tools, and who were directly involved with questions concerning the modification of work systems. In this kind of sector the predominant figure was that of the worker-inventor, or at least of the worker collaborating very closely with technicians and planning engineers. One result of this situation in Germany was the success of the industrial instrumentation and machine tool industry. While German agriculture and the German textile industry were in the throes of recession and crisis, Germany was producing the best agricultural and textile machinery in the world.

Let us examine the workers who were employed in these highly dynamic sectors: their metal work demanded utmost precision; they participated directly in modifications to the products they produced; as well as transforming their own techniques of work. This is what produced the success of sectors such as the German aircraft industry which in 1913 was considered the world's leader. Thus it seems natural to find in those sectors a whole series of paternalistic initiatives on the part of companies concerning higher wages, shorter working hours, and even profit-sharing (a method of pre-empting workers' demands that Western German employers were also to practice in the period 1950-65).

Individual capitalists were forced to pay in order to maintain stable skilled and specialised workforces. They favoured the crystallisation of labour aristocracies and sought to reduce as much as possible the mobility of their labour force, especially within the same sector.

Subsequently, some of these companies were to receive a powerful boost from the war. Thus, for example, Zeiss of Jena and the other major optics company, Leitz (Leica) developed on the basis of government contracts for the manufacture of aiming instruments; while Bosch benefited similarly in the production of the accumulators and electromagnetic hardware required by the military equipment of the period. Optical industries were located mainly in Wirttenberg and in Saxony, while light engineering, precision engineering and the electromechanical industries concentrated gradually around Berlin.

It is no accident that the experiments in workers' council systems acquired their most marked political and managerial characteristics precisely in those three regions - Wirttenberg, Berlin and Saxony - where the machine tool, electromechanic and optical industries were more concentrated, i.e. where highly specialised industrial workers were predominant within the overall labour force.These highly specialised workers of the machine and tool industry with a high level of professional ability, engaged in the precision working of metals, well-versed in the use of tools (both manual and machine tools) and collaborating with technicians and engineers in modifications to the labour process, were, by the nature of their position, materially more susceptible to a political-organisational project such as the workers' councils, i.e. workers' self-management of production. The concept of workers' self-management could not have had such a wide appeal in the German workers' council movement without the presence of a labour force inextricably linked to the technology of the labour process, with a strong sense of professional values and naturally inclined to place a high value on their function as "producers". The concept of workers' control as a system of management was a concept

that saw the worker as an autonomous producer, and the factory's workforce as a self-sufficient entity. It only saw the relation between the workers and individual employers or companies, and - as we shall see - it distrusted "politics" in its broad sense, i.e. the relationship between organisation and power, party and revolution.

This relationship between occupational structures and particular determining political-ideological attitudes is not a new discovery, but it is worth stressing, partly because Germany provides a very substantial illustration of the relationship, and partly to serve as a reminder to those with a taste for confused and inconclusive discussions of "class-consciousness", as if the latter were a spiritual or cultural fact. Another thing that should be stressed is that the self-management element was the most significant aspect of the German council movement, it was by no means the only significant aspect in terms of revolutionary praxis and projectuality. It only constitutes its most typical feature.

Another feature of the German movement, directly linked to the first, was the virtually total involvement of the technician stratum. In this case too the material position of a particular sector of labour power within the engineering industry led to a specific political choice. At that time, technicians and engineers had not yet become the functionaries of the scientific organisation of exploitation, since Taylorism was adopted in Germany only in the post-War period. However, German companies in general, and not only those in the engineering sector, had a very advanced level of administrative-bureaucratic organisation. The German industrial boom preceding World War I was due primarily to two objective conditions: the use of technology and the application of advanced research (the number of patents registered was enormous) and the extreme efficiency of the bureaucratic-administrative apparatus. This was made possible by the existence of basic infrastructures such as an organisation of professional education much more advanced and well-articulated compared with that of other countries; a close connection between university research and industrial applications; the tradition of administrative efficiency that had been characteristic of Prussian bureaucracy - both before and after Bismarck - which, during the industrial boom pre-World War I, spread to the company level. On the basis of reports written by engineers for the workers' council movement and published in its press, we know that the bureaucratic (ie administrative and accounting) organization of German companies was very efficient and was matched during this period by a higher percentage increase in the employment of white collar as opposed to blue collar workers.

Traditionally, German bureaucracy had always been a faithful executor of orders from above. This remained true in industry, but the executive position of the technical and clerical workforce, combined with the material and technically conditioned position of the technical workforce in the engineering industry of that time, tended to produce a homogeneity of the overall workforce in the company which at a given moment (and for a short time) was able to transform itself into political unity. Within the kind of enterprise described above it makes no sense to go looking for a managerial class with decision-making powers located between the owners and the working class. From this point of view, for all its extraordinary dynamicism, the German engineering industry had a "backward" structure with respect to the stage of industrial and technological development represented by Fordism, i.e. by the mass-production industry of consumer goods. This particular nature of its workforce, characterised by high professional values, and its characteristic company structure, were not at all a vanguard in terms of capitalist

industrial organisation. A remarkably authoritative testimony of this comes from Henry Ford himself, who, in his autobiography, scorns that type of machine enterprise, claiming that at the time when he was about to introduce the conveyor-belt and the assembly line, the engineering industry as a whole was static, backward, and unresponsive to the idea of changes in the organisation of productive process and in the modification of the organic composition of capital. By resisting the kinds of innovations proposed by Ford, the German engineering industry expressed an all-out determination to defend a particular kind of labour force, and therefore a particular kind of "labour aristocracy". This resistance could be seen across the board, among individual employers, as well as among technicians and workers. The model of the medium-scale engineering enterprise which maintained its capacity to keep coming up with new products and which, after more or less long periods of experimentation and planning, was beginning to embark on serial production (but not mass production), was to be swept away by Fordism precisely in its fundamental component - that of labour. Ford's innovations were merely a qualitative advance in terms of machinery; in the long run, they represented the progressive extinction of the kind of worker who had ties to his machine, to his company, and to his craft. The highly skilled worker of the engineering industry was to give way to the modern assembly-line worker, who was de-skilled, without roots, highly mobile and interchangeable. Thus it is important to keep in mind that well before the German "labour aristocracy" was to become the "revolutionary vanguard", well before its "trial by fire", it had already been objectively doomed to extinction by the vanguards of capitalism.

Fordism not only profoundly altered the internal structure of the workforce by replacing the craftsman, or the "labour aristocracy", with the modern line-worker, the mass worker; it also considerably altered both the structure of the wage and the labour (and capitalist) view of the wage. For Taylor the wage as an incentives was directly linked to the position of the individual worker in the individual enterprise; this derived from the individualistic and atomistic approach typical of Taylor's philosophy. For Ford, however, the wage became a general quantity of income to be used as a means of controlling the dynamics of the system; it was an overall quantity of capital to be injected within an overall framework of planned development. In 1911, Ford's ideas were nothing more than the intelligent discoveries of an individual entrepreneur. It took the threat of a generalised overturning of power relations in the factory (the threat that the workers' council movement, even in its co-management version, represented for capital as a whole), for them to become the strategy of collective capital - i.e. the Keynesian "income revolution". This threat was not because their projects for an industrial "New Order" were particularly advanced, or because the workers' council movement had such a strong base among the labour aristocracy, i.e. jeopardised the planned integration of the class into the system. The threat was rather due to the fact that it was an international class movement. Here the working class as a whole was attempting for the first time in history to reverse the trend in the process of capitalist development, in backward as well as in advanced sectors, at plant level as well as at the level of society as a whole. It was not so much its organisational, political-ideological, or sociological character, but its international character that constituted the revolutionary feature of the workers' council movement. It was a world-wide 1905 in which only the weakest link broke.

In order to reconstruct the workers' council movement and to define it in political terms, we must follow the cycles of working-class struggle at the international level as well as class composition within the capitalist area.

So let us return to our example in the case of Germany. The discussion concerning the structure of the manual and technical workforce and its geographical distribution is absolutely inadequate and runs the risk of becoming incorrect and misleading unless we first investigate the political class composition as it existed in Germany. We might offer the following as a general methodological point: backwardness does not necessarily mean backwardness in the working class. If, in analysing political struggles, we retain the usual distinction between advanced (US, England, Germany) and backward capitalist countries (Russia, Italy), we run the risk of generating confusion and schematicism. At the level of subjective organisation, the particular characteristics of the struggle in Russia are as advanced as in other countries - if not more so. While in the periods 1904-6, 1911-13, and 1917-20, we find a capital that is characterised by major imbalances between advanced and backward areas, in terms of class political activity we find a considerable degree of class homogeneity across all countries. We can thus speak of a series of cycles of struggle beginning in the 1904-6 period, which were international in nature. The specific characteristic of this first cycle is not easy to fix in precise chronological terms, but it stands out clearly: it is the mass strike arising out of a situation of endemic struggle and leading to violent and insurrectional actions. This is best exemplified in the US. Starting in 1901, a series of violent mass strikes shakes the whole US industrial structure. With its centre, its class pole, located with the Rocky Mountain miners, these struggles spread primarily among steel, textile and transportation workers, but, above all, construction workers. In 1905, at the peak of the struggle, while the Soviets were coming into being in Russia, in the USA the International Workers of the World (IWW) was formed; the most radical proletarian organisation ever in the USA, the only revolutionary class organisation before the rise of the Afro-American movement. Today there is much to be said and learned from the IWW. Although many of its militants were anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists who had migrated to the US from Eastern and Western Europe, the IWW cannot merely be written off as the American equivalent of French anarcho-syndicalism.

What was there in the IWW that is so extraordinarily modern? Although it was based on an old class nucleus, the Western Federation of Miners, the merit of the IWW was that it attempted to organise the American proletariat in terms of its intrinsic characteristics. It was primarily an immigrant proletariat, and therefore a mixture of ethnic groups which could only be organised in a certain way. Secondly, it was a mobile proletariat, a fact which very much militated against identification with any particular job or skill, and which also militated against workers developing ties to individual factories (even if only to take them over). The IWW made the notion of the social factory a concrete reality, and it built on the extraordinary level of communication and coordination possible within the struggles of a mobile workforce. The IWW succeeded in creating an absolutely original type of agitator: not the mole digging for decades within the single factory or proletarian neighbourhood, but the type of agitator who swims within the stream of proletarian struggles, who moves from one end to the other of the enormous American continent and who rides the seismic wave of the struggle, overcoming national boundaries and sailing the oceans before organising conventions to found sister organisations. The Wobblies' concern with transportation workers and

longshoremen, their constant determination to strike at capital as an international market, their intuitive understanding of the mobile proletariat - employed today, unemployed tomorrow - as a virus of social insubordination, as the agent of the "social wildcat": all these things make the IWW a class organisation which anticipated present-day forms of struggle, and was completely independent of the tradition of the Second and the Third Internationals. The IWW is the direct link from Marx's First International to the post-communist era.

The violence and the continuity of the American strikes during the first two decades of the century show how politically correct Marx's intuition was thirty years earlier when he wanted the headquarters of "his" International to move to New York. It is difficult to locate the high point of these struggles, but the trajectory of the cycle is roughly analogous to the European one and to that of the Russian proletariat. A particularly memorable moment was the 1905 struggle of 5,000 teamsters in Chicago, which ended in clashes with the police at a cost of 20 deaths and 400 wounded.

The year 1904 saw Italy's first general strike.

On 3 January 1905, the Putilov factory workers of St Petersburg came out on strike and the Russian revolution of 1905 began.

During the first months of that same year the great strike of the German miners broke out in the Bruchstrasse mine and spread throughout the Ruhr. This struggle in Germany had been preceded by the strikes of textile and paper workers during 1903 and 1904. The workers in these sectors had the worst conditions and the worst wages in German industry. In the paper industry there had been the highest incidence of permanent disability arising from workplace accidents and the famous German labour unions were more or less absent from the textile and paper sectors: these workers were not to obtain their first contract until in 1919, after the overthrow of the monarchy. The strike had broken out spontaneously, as had the miners' strike of 1905.

In the class composition of pre-War Germany, the Ruhr miners represented the most advanced sector. This working-class nucleus was perhaps the only one with the ability to set in motion the whole social class fabric when it entered into struggle. A typical instance had been the sudden and spontaneous strike of 1889 which had immediately turned into a mass strike. The unions had only moved in at the last moment. The Kaiser and Bismarck had to intervene directly in order to bring the struggle to an end in the face of the unions' negotiating and organisational inability, and the stubborn resistance put up by the coal barons. The miners succeeded in forcing the employers to accept all of their demands except the most important one, i.e. the eight-hour day, to include the time taken travelling to and from the workface. In fact, the 1905 struggle started precisely with this demand. As a result of large-scale mining, the mines had become deeper and the time needed to go down and come up had virtually doubled.

The crisis of the mining industry had forced about 9,000 miners to leave the district; the rate of occupational illness had shown a frightening increase; but, most of all, the miners were not prepared to tolerate the presence of foremen. The union had learned from the drubbing it had received in 1889 - which had cost it a lot at the organisational level (only 40% of the miners were now union members), and initially it sought to localise the struggle. But the strike very quickly communicated itself to other areas: within 10 days, 220,000 miners were striking, out of a total of 270,000 in the district. The demands had been rejected by the barons with their usual arrogance. They would not tolerate any challenge to their "I'm the boss here" principle.The

characteristics of the German miners' strike prefigured the characteristics of the great struggles of the workers' council period. Two in particular stand out: the non-violence of the struggle (even the bourgeois press praised the orderly behaviour of the workers), and the demands regarding power relations in the workplace. On the one hand we see the extreme sociality of the struggle (which, in this aspect too, was homogeneous with the high-communicability mass strikes in the United States, Italy and Russia), and on the other, demands were still directed to individual capitalists or groups of capitalists in a given sector. What this meant was that, for the German miners, power had to be changed first and foremost at the place of production. In other words, even in the most advanced class-pole we encounter the same characteristic of anchoring subversive activity to the place of production strictly defined. It is interesting to notice that, once again, the real force in the negotiations was the government as represented by the secretary of state Count von Posadowsky. A faithful follower of Bismarck and of his "state socialism", the Count immediately enacted legislative measures which substantially met the miners' demands concerning working hours, and instituted "Labour Committees" in mines employing more than 100 people. This institution preceded by a very short time similar "Internal Committees" in Italy. In the Government's whole behaviour we can see characteristics which were to reappear later. In Germany the interests of collective capital were protected by the state or, in 1918, by the coming-to-power of social democracy. In 1905 the initiative of introducing labour representation in the factory came from capital. It was a far cry from anything like co-management: they were merely committees meant to deal with local disputes to prevent them from erupting into overt struggles which might eventually have led to a general struggle. Similarly, in 1920, under the pressure of the revolutionary movement, the social-democratic coalition government was to intervene against projects of socialisation meant to yield all power in the factories to the workers' councils, with the law of the Betriebsrate.

The Ruhr strike did not close the period of the mass strikes in Germany: in January 1906 a general political strike paralysed Hamburg's factories and harbour - this was the strike which Luxemburg defined as the "general test of the insurrection".

We have dealt at some length with the miners' strike in order to identify the most advanced class pole in Germany in the pre-War period. Unfortunately, we have not been able to use statistics broken down into specific industrial sectors in order to reconstruct the whole German class composition in relation to the movements in struggle. The following absolute figures on the strikes at least confirm the statement that the 1904-6 period represents a quite distinct cycle of struggles: in 1903 there were 1,347 strikes, 86,000 strikers, with 7,000 factories involved; in 1904 there were 1,870 strikes, with 113,000 strikers and 10,000 factories involved. In 1905 there were 2,400 strikes, with 400,000 strikers, affecting 14,000 factories; in 1906 the number of strikes was 3,000, the number of strikers was 270,000, and the factories involved 16,000; in 1907 there were 2,200 strikes, with 190,000 strikers, and with 13,000 factories involved. The following year all these figures are reduced by two thirds. It is interesting to note how the change in the course of 1905-6: compared to 1905, the total of strikers in 1906 does not have the solid mass of 200,000 strikers from the Ruhr; yet the number of strikes increases by 30% and the number of factories involved by approximately 13%. Similarly, in 1907: while compared to 1905 the number of strikers has fallen by about 52% compared to 1905, the number of strikes decreased by only 8% and the number of

factories involved also decreased by 8-9%. What this means is that the struggle had spread from the great class pole represented by the Ruhr miners into middle-size factories, thus affecting the whole social fabric of German capital. It was the initial thrust generated by the miners which succeeded in setting in motion the mechanism of struggle in the engineering factories characterised by paternalism and a labour aristocracy.

The overwhelming presence of 200,000 Ruhr miners in the German political class composition and the dominant presence of the coal-steel sector within Germany's industrial geography can be compared to the position occupied by FIAT workers and FIAT capital in Italy. In the years following 1905, however, a whole series of sectors underwent expansion and the dominance of these 200,000 miners from the Ruhr was balanced out, primarily through the creation of massive industrial centres in the Berlin region, in the Leipzig-Dresden-Chemnitz triangle, in Wirttenberg, as well as in the proximity of the ports of Hamburg, Kiel, and Bremen. Thus, in the third cycle of struggles, the decisive struggles of the 1917-20 period, these other class poles were to be the first to advance the struggle, first Berlin and the ports, then Saxony, and finally they would be joined by the Ruhr.

Turning again from political class composition to the structure of the labour force, it must be emphasised that the Ruhr miners and the skilled machine workers shared a common element that was very important, especially in terms of the problems inherent in the modification of the organic composition of capital and in the innovative process necessary to capitalist development. Mine labour was not easily mechanisable. In the short and medium term it was unthinkable that a technological solution such as mechanisation could drastically transform the employment structure and the skill structure of the mining industry. In other words, the coal-steel barons realised that they were going to have to live with those workers for, given the situation of full employment, they could not have disposed of them and replaced them with workers of a different type: a Fordist solution in the mines (and in the steel industry) was not easily applicable. By the same token, the employers in the engineering industry wanted to keep their own workers, and were inclined towards paternalistic solutions, in order to create islands of privilege as regards both wages and conditions. Neither the authoritarian and arrogant barons of the coal-steel sector, nor the enlightened and paternalistic employers of the engineering sector, were able to set in motion a short- or long-run labour policy different from the one they were following. In other words, the particular developmental conjuncture of the two sectors posed very rigid limitations which severely conditioned the capitalists' freedom to manoeuvre and imposed particular choices on them. The employers could have worked on modifying all other aspects of capitalist policies, such as improving the financial structure of their companies; accelerating concentration, improving their technical structure and the technologies used; finding new markets; creating new products; cooperating (or not) with the unions and the government; showing more entrepreneurial dynamism; favouring or opposing an external collaboration with the social democrats in government, etc. However, even if they had done all of this, they would not have been able to make any substantial alterations in the structural characteristics of their labour power. In my opinion this is very important because it shows how the rigidity of the German industrial system was one of the elements which made the overall workforce an independent variable such as to

constitute, through the mere objective fact of its continued existence, a serious threat to further capitalist development in Germany.

The above considerations serve to correct the kind of interpretation that starts from the reformist character of the self-management project of the workers' councils, and goes on to deny that the struggles' had any real revolutionary import, except in terms of a revival of capitalist development. While from a theoretical point of view this position is correct, and remains valid as a strategic position from which one can draw conclusions concerning workers' struggles, corrections from a historical point of view, or, better, the historical determination of that position, leads us to conclude that the post-War movement was of a subversive character. A labour organisation which merely reiterated the structure of the overall workforce in the factory, and which acted for workers only in their position and function as producers, an organisation whose overall demands merely sought to keep workers as they were within the factory, was a potentially lethal organisation for German capital: ultimately it would have blocked its possibility of manoeuvre by depriving the system of the element of flexibility which was so crucially needed if capitalist development was to be rescued by means of a modification of the organic composition of capital. This type of bottleneck was precisely what confronted Italian capitalism in the period before fascism, in more or less identical terms. Thus, the revolutionary import of a movement has to be calculated on the basis of an understanding of the historically determined stage of development in a specific situation. German capital's short-term impossibility of altering - over a twenty- or thirty-year period - the structure of the workforce, the wage structure, and the organic composition of capital, left it with a lack of choices and alternatives which translated as an inability to find alternative political solutions even before the 1918 revolutionary wave or, rather, a lack of solutions that could be obtained through mere economic instruments means of development, or through a reformist recuperation of working-class struggle. Why did even a social-democratic organisational recuperation of the workers' councils turn out to be impossible in Germany? Why was German social democracy unable to find a reformist solution to the political crisis of the system and why did it have to present itself purely as an apparatus of repression of the struggles and of the workers' council organisations? Why, in 1918, did German social democracy have to abandon Kautsky and choose Noske? A combination of social democracy and repression, i.e. the social-Fascist solution, turned out to be the answer to match such a high level of subversive struggle. In order to clarify things, it is worth looking at the quite different solutions adopted by the American ruling class after the crisis generated by the struggles of 1904-5. One of the elements which greatly favoured the victorious response of capitalism in the USA was the radical transformation which took place in employment structures and the structure of the workforce. From 1905 to 1914, the USA received no less than 10 million immigrants. It is easy to imagine what this mass of sub-proletarians meant in terms of the reserve army of labour and the undermining of occupational structures. The half-million foreign workers present in Germany (mostly Italian and Polish) were a relatively small figure in comparison. There is no doubting the genius of Ford's intervention, and the strategic importance of his projects in terms of advancing mechanisation and in the organisation of the wage as a function of consumption. But the main contribution of the Fordist solution was to render violent counter-revolution unnecessary in the USA as the only way out. Through a massive modification in the organic composition of capital, Fordism also succeeded in bringing

about a major change in the skill structure of the workforce. The assembly-line worker at Ford was very different from the skilled worker in the German engineering industry. His very interchangeability (he could have been an Italian just landed and still unable to say "wage" in English) meant that he did not have that attachment to the individual factory which was still typical of the social figure that had created the workers' councils movement in Germany, in the conviction that self-management was sufficient to create the socialist society.

Thus in Germany the situation was different. The rigidity of the system reduced the margins of manoeuvre, and even Bernsteinian social democracy represented an objective danger before the war (this, and not the Kaiser's "authoritarianism", was the reason why it was not co-opted into the government before the outbreak of war). These bottlenecks within the system forced German capital to intensify its already inherent tendency toward aggressive expansion in foreign markets in order to find a way out of the crisis, thus giving rise to the inter-capitalist conflicts described so well by Lenin in his pamphlet on imperialism. If the SPD wanted to join the government, it would have to abandon all intermediate solutions and totally accept social-imperialism. This occurred in 1914, with the approval of the war credits by the social democrats group. But even in this, as we shall see, things are not as simple as they are made out by the official historians of the labour movement when they talk of a "betrayal" by the social democrats.

After this summing-up the events of 1905 with reference to the high points of the international working class, little needs to be added when we come to the cycle of struggles of the 1911-13 period. The same class nuclei initiate the struggle and set in motion the working class in the various countries. Just to recall a few dates: 1911, strike of the Harriman railway workers in the US; 1911-12, strikes by the coal miners in West Virginia, and the memorable struggle of the textile workers in Lawrence (even then there was a wave of repression against IWW militants); 4 April 1912, massacre of the precious-metal miners of Lena in Russia; in June 1912, Lenin writes his article on the "revival of revolution" in Russia; in 1912, the third mass strike of the Ruhr miners in Germany.

This time the struggle took place in a moment of high economic activity and after the steel and coal barons had signed an agreement committing the individual capitalist to refuse employment for four years to any worker who had been fired for politico-disciplinary reasons by other employers in the same sector. In Germany, we move from 155,000 strikers in 1910, to 400,000 in 1912, and 250,000 in 1913. This is the period when workers make the greatest use of the trade unions. Trade union membership jumps from 1,800,000 in 1910 to 2,300,000 in 1912. This was the highest figure since the turn of the century. But the workers were using the union without making a fetish of organisation. By way of illustration, in 1911 the number of steel- and metal-workers that were members of the socialist union was 133,000; an increase of 40,000 from 1910. But the number of members who then left the union in 1912 was as high as 67,000, i.e. a negative mobility of 75%. Three quarters of the members were new members. These figures need to be cited in order to demystify the myth of the German workers' fetishism for organisation: for each member who remained, three left. Moreover, with 133,000 members, the steel- and metal-workers' union organised only 25% of the labour force employed in that sector, compared with 1905, when it organised 7%. When we

remember the large number of strikes in those same years, it immediately becomes obvious that the great majority of these struggles were spontaneous.

2.The Theoretical Discussion in the International Working-Class Movement

The decade at the turn of the century was a period of intense and passionate theoretical debate within the international working-class movement. Obviously, it is impossible here to deal with every central theme. I shall limit myself to picking out a few, and particularly those which underlay the discussion and political planning of the workers' council movement: the relationship between spontaneity and leadership, between tactics and strategy, and the relationship between trade unions and the party. These are the themes around which the battle raged among the three great currents in the working-class movement: the revisionist, the revolutionary, and the anarcho-syndicalist. Having dealt mainly with the struggles in Russia, Germany and the USA, I shall concentrate on the thought of Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, Daniel DeLeon and Lenin. It should be remembered that almost all the fundamental works on these problems were written before the Russian revolution of 1905.

In a series of articles in Neue Zeit and in his main work Evolutionary Socialism, Bernstein touched on a very important point. He maintained that the clash between capital and labour had to be seen in terms of the relationship between wages and profits. From this correct observation he drew a series of consequences which led to the labour movement losing the class perspective concerning the seizure of power. It is impossible to understand why his works generated so much turmoil unless we bear in mind that his initial formulation was correct. From it Bernstein drew two consequences: 1) that trade-union struggle, conceived as economic struggle, should take predominance over political struggle, so that unions were above the party; and the forms of struggle had to exclude mass demonstrative action in order to operate within the domain of concrete contractual negotiation; and 2) that political struggle had to concern itself exclusively with the growth of the economic power of the labour force and should limit itself to creating an institutional framework for that growth or, in other words, be its juridical sanction. We might say that Bernstein's position meant losing sight of the final goal of socialism and left existing power structures untouched, but at the same time we have to say that it went beyond the fatalism, determinism and mechanistic thinking typical of previous Second International positions. Bernstein's position was "economism" as a general theory of the class movement. Precisely because of this, however, it embodied a dynamism and a possibility for immediate application. This was immediately seen by the leaders of the large German labour organisations, who took it on board, and in so doing moved a step ahead of the party's hesitant high priests (Kautsky) who were nervous about departing from the orthodox line. Because of the weight that the German organisations had within the Second International, this immediate acceptance by the trade unions gave Bernstein's doctrines an immediate popularity and diffusion, even if in some countries the unions were strongly influenced by the theories of anarcho-syndicalism (which, however, shared with Bernsteinism the rejection of "party" organisation or the idea that it had to be overcome. The official separation of the German unions from social democracy occurred in 1903. In reality it was simply a declaration of the trade union's autonomy from the party. Clearly, for the revolutionaries, the political element, or the importance of the "politicisation" factor in labour struggles, became fundamental in challenging Bernsteinism. They felt the need to reintroduce a strategic vision and at the same time formulate a type of organisation, a

centre of decision, which could maintain a firm hold on tactics and strategy. This, however, had to emphasise spontaneity, as a means of challenging trade unions' institutional possibilities of controlling the struggle process in terms of individual actions (daily tactics) and in its overall line. But to speak of spontaneity was to use to a term which had been the battle-cry of anarcho-syndicalism. It was necessary to free the term "spontaneity" of its anarchistic content, and the term "politics" of its bureaucratic and unmilitant connotations. By then, not only union leaders but also social democratic party leaders were beginning to accept Bernstein's perspective. Above all, it was necessary to begin talking about the workers not simply as labour power but as an autonomous political class. It was difficult to win this theoretical-political debate in terms of majorities in party organisations or in terms of better political argumentations. What was needed was a crucial political event to throw on the scale and for all revolutionaries 1905 provided precisely that: a prospect of of victory over revisionism.

The first revolutionary replies to Bernstein come before 1905. They begin with Luxemburg and her 1899 pamphlet "Reform or Revolution?" which defines once and for all the union's specific field of activity and its institutional domain. According to Rosa Luxemburg, such activity "is limited essentially to efforts at regulating capitalist exploitation" according to market conditions and "can in no way influence the process of production itself".Yet she emphasises how the trade-union economic activity could lead to a choking of capitalist development, thus laying the premises for a crisis of the system. At this point "political and socialist class struggle must be undertaken anew with fresh vigour". Concerning the relationship between wages and profits, this is what Luxemburg says: "The fact is that trade unions are least able to create an economic offensive against profit. Trade unions are nothing more than the organised defence of labour power against the attacks of profit. They express resistance offered by the working class to the oppression of capitalist economy."The struggle between wages and profits "does not take place in the blue of the sky, it takes place within the well-defined framework of the law of wages. The law of wages is not shattered by trade union activity, but rather applied.The other important point touched upon by Luxemburg concerns the relationship between political struggle and the struggle for democracy: "today the socialist working-class movement is, and is bound to be, the only framework for democracy... The socialist movement is not bound to bourgeois democracy, but on the contrary, the fate of democracy is bound with the socialist movement."

As important as Luxemburg's argument was in demystifying and unmasking Bernstein's theories, like all purely demystificatory arguments, it left out too much: it was essentially negative and not reconstructive. Rosa understood that Bersteinism had precipitated a crisis in both the revolutionary line and the theory of the party. One of Bernstein's most successful slogans was that "the party is nothing, the movement is everything". In the context in which it had been developed, this slogan had meant the transition from a cadre party towards a party of opinion. Yet the slogan had the merit of forcing the organisation to face up to the problem of its relation to the mass movements and moving away from an excessive concern with the inner workings of party life and a fetishisation of self-conservation. Bernstein introduced a dynamic element into party life and in the bureaucratic planning of a self-sufficient organisational growth. Another of his favoured slogans was: "Long live economics, down with politics", very reminiscent of the French anarcho-syndicalist slogan: "M'efiez-vous des politiciens!" Rosa Luxemburg realised that her criticism of the SPD line and of the unions might give fuel

to theories aimed at abolishing the party, or any party, old or new. This might have led to a revisionist version of the anarcho-syndicalist notion of spontaneism. On the other hand, she was unwilling to renounce either her critique of bureaucracy or her evaluation of the positive role of spontaneity. Might not her anti-bureaucratic polemic have strengthened the hand of those who criticised politics and the party-form in any shape or form? And might not her favourable attitude to spontaneism have strengthened anarchist spontaneism?

It was considerations of this kind that led Luxemburg to propose an intermediate solution, which led her to what Lenin defined as the theory of the "organisation-as-a-process" and of "tactics-as-a-process". In fact, in her 1904 article "Organisational Problems of Russian Social Democracy", she reiterated the idea that the masses go beyond the party while at the same time emphasising how not everything of the old organisation was to be thrown out.In elaborating her politico-organisational line, Luxemburg must have been taking into account the conditions within which a revolutionary current would have had to move in Germany, i.e. a "boring from within" approach inside the SPD. Thus her sociological efforts were aimed at locating that stratum of cadres at the grass roots of the party which, owing to their origins and their preparation, could best learn the lesson of spontaneity and could best understand the trends and directions of struggles that were taking place outside, or independently of, the organisation. A new revolutionary outbreak would be needed if the party's internal situation were to be unblocked. In fact it is not accidental that some of the reservations in her 1904 position are dropped in 1906, the year of "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions", in which she gave her analysis of the 1905 revolution in Russia. Having traced the phenomenology of the Russian-Polish mass strikes, she goes on to pose the most important problem - the question of leadership and organisation. Her proposals, however, are still too general.What we have here is basically standards for the for the maintenance of a correct relation with spontaneity. As yet they include no precise indications on how to organise and direct spontaneity. Once again, Rosa finds herself caught between the sociology of organisation and the theory of the party.In other words, leadership still remains with the factory-based cadres of the party. In fact, in her analysis of the Russian strikes, she quotes with emphasis the report of the Petersburg unions as a model in terms of organisation and leadership. However, while we may indicate these limitations in Luxemburg's thinking, we should not forget that virtually all the young and working-class cadres who gave life to the workers' councils movement had found their fundamental practical-theoretical orientation in her works. For the workers and intellectuals of the new generation who had just joined the party, the Russian experience of 1905 was crucial. The "left" of the SPD exerted a strong influence on them, both through the leadership role played by Karl Liebknecht in the youth organisation - which later became such a centre of dissension that the leadership had to dissolve it - and through Rosa's pre-eminent position in the party cadre school.

Another important point in Luxemburg's 1906 essays is the final analysis she gave of class composition in Germany, which, not accidentally, begins with the miners, or rather with what she refers to as the misery of the miners. In emphasising the sociality of the struggle in the mass strikes, she points out the importance of the political unification that was achieved between the working class, the poor proletariat and the sub-proletariat.

Since, for Lenin, spontaneity was the lowest and not, as in Luxemburg's case, the highest level of struggle from which to begin a discussion concerning political organisation, when he wrote What Is to Be Done? he found himself already beyond a whole series of problems in which Rosa was still entangled. Without embarking on a detailed analysis of Lenin's pamphlet, I shall outline the basic elements of the background to the great differences between Bolshevism and the workers' council movement.

A) All organisational discussion is subordinated to the political line, so Lenin begins by calling for a re-evaluation of theory, in order to be able to emerge from the clutches of "empiricist activism". Secondly, he traces as precisely as possible the dividing line between Bernsteinism/economism and the revolutionary position. Finally he tackles the problem of the relationship between leadership and spontaneity and accuses economism of giving in to spontaneity and therefore limiting itself to an agitational role in spontaneous struggles.

B) In Kautsky's formulation, bourgeois intellectuals have the task of bringing social-democratic consciousness from the outside, since it does not arise spontaneously among the working-class masses, whose natural tendency is towards trade unionism.

Starting with Engels' definition of economic and trade-union struggles as "resistance against capitalism", Lenin outlines the institutional boundaries between the union and the party. The union's task is to struggle against the individual capitalist in a given sector, while "Social-Democracy represents the working class not in its relation to a given group of employers, but in relation to all classes in modern society, to the state as an organised political force." [Note 15: V.I. Lenin, op. cit., p. 56.] Thus, the tasks of political agitation and denunciation must not only be extended to workers' economic struggles, but to all possible domains.

D) The terrorist solution is also a mistake since it does not contribute in any way to the political organisation and leadership of spontaneity but, rather, it explicitly renounces them. E) It is when he comes to deal with the "primitivism" of social-democratic organisation in Russia that Lenin seems to dwell on the technical aspects of clandestine organisation. He stresses what he considers to be the specifically political aspect of the work, as opposed to agitation and intervention in working-class struggles which are only aspects of that work - even if the most "essential" ones - and proposes to the party a kind of articulated and multi-faceted intervention similar to that of German social-democracy.

F) The impact of What Is To Be Done? derived from the extreme frankness with which Lenin tackled problems such as the function of intellectuals and workers. Although Lenin does not explicitly state it in this work, what is most striking is the great theoretical gap and historical backwardness of the middle-European revolutionary currents in relation to the Russian experience. In the brief outline history of the Bolshevik party which Lenin wrote in 1920 in Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder, he indicates how already in 1902 both he and his friends watched with a certain detachment the first formulations of a new European Left which was still bogged down in questions which the Russian experience had already gone beyond. The tactical support given to Luxemburg cannot conceal their serious differences, particularly concerning the conception of the party and the relationship between leadership and spontaneity. Up to 1918, Lenin restricted himself to reckoning with Bernsteinian opportunism. Later on, after the consolidation of Soviet power, he was able to deal with

Pannekoek, Daumig and, indirectly, with Rosa's theory of organisation-as-a-process, which he once again regarded as a submission to spontaneity, as the conflation of the party with the spontaneous movements, and as creating confusion between politicised workers, workers in struggle, and professional revolutionary cadres.

G) One thing was particularly clear, i.e. that it was not sufficient for a worker, for example, to have a correct view of the factory struggle, or of the struggle that he was materially involved in organising, in order to make him a revolutionary cadre, a professional revolutionary. It was not sufficient to reverse the social function that the system assigns to individuals in production and turn it into a political function as a minority acting at the point of production in order to obtain a Bolshevik cadre. On the other hand, Luxemburgian organisation represented a coordinated network of acting minorities eventually able to overthrow the reformist leadership in class organisations.

But is this all the difference between Lenin and Rosa? So far, we have reduced it to the most skeletal formal terms and we have not been able to grasp another key element of Lenin's position: i.e. that the distinction between a network of acting minorities and a network of professional revolutionaries is simply a question regarding the historical stages of the class struggle and therefore the different levels of development of spontaneity. It is not a question of denying the function of the acting minorities in order to favour that of the professional cadres. Rather, both must be seen as expressions of the movement's level of growth: the former as being more backward than the latter. If so, are there laws determining the movement's growth? Is it possible to formulate a scientific theory of the party? Lenin's answer to this was that the scientific nature of this theory is wholly a function of the degree of correctness in analysing power relations between classes in a given historical moment.

The point is not to prefer one organisational crystallisation to another but of evaluating the exact level attained by the struggle and the stage of development of the party. The very distinction between mass strike, political strike, and insurrectional strike is a practical example of three different levels of spontaneity, or organisation of the struggle, and of power relations among classes. And if there are any laws, they are to be found in the historical experience of the proletariat: in unsuccessful revolutions. Like the construction of dykes which is always based on the highest levels reached by the tide, the science of the party must theoretically grasp all the levels of the struggle and organisation attained so far, in order to both regain and overcome them at the same time. Every new and more advanced level of struggle is matched by a re-organisation of the capitalist system as a dialectical response to the class confrontation. Thus, the science of the party is always measured by means of the historical levels reached by capitalist organisation.

The revolutionary hypothesis seeks to anticipate theoretically those stages of the struggle which must be practically brought about. Yet even the best hypotheses are surpassed by unforeseen levels of struggle. Such was the situation in which Lenin found himself in 1905 with the rise of the Soviets during the soviet stage of party development where the working class presented itself as "power".

Much has been said about the polemics between Lenin and Luxemburg concerning the problem of centralisation and the minority's right to dissent: in the historiography of the labour movement Lexemburg is accused of regressive democraticism, or she is exalted by anti-Stalinist groups for having anticipated the struggle against repressive and opportunistic bureaucracies. This polemic has been primarily used in a

counterrevolutionary way by left-wing socialists. Perhaps all this historiography should be thrown out in order better to grasp the meaning of Luxemburg's positions. Although strongly bound to the Russian-Polish experience, she found herself confronted with the problem of creating a revolutionary faction within a mass-based party full of possibilities such as the SPD. Rosa realised that it was impossible to wrestle the direction of labour struggles away from the opportunistic policies of the SPD merely by relying on political and minority means without reversing the relationship between class and unions. She realised that within a conflictual society such as Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany, this could not be done with Lenin's means. Furthermore, she was perfectly aware of the increasingly wider gap developing between "workers and politics": between the struggling proletariat and professional politicians. This was not merely a phenomenon limited to French anarcho-syndicalism. In the IWW founding convention, Heywood had shouted: "Everyone in the IWW! Out with the politicians!" Rosa Luxemburg realised that political organisation within the working class was brought about only by the party's workers' cadres and that, in the subversive struggle, only they could have prevented a total break between complete workers' control and a political direction. Only those cadres could have defeated trade-union gradualism and the opportunism of parliamentarians and salaried functionaries. But probably she did not realise that, at that point, the problem would have been to break the trade unions rather than the party.

Like Lenin and all European politicians at the time of the Second International, Rosa considered unions sacred and repeated ad nauseam that even the most opportunist European unions were nevertheless "working-class" organisations and not a bunch of gangsters as Gompers' union in the USA. Thus, the faction that Rosa wanted to create was essentially a network of political workers' cadres closely linked to factory struggles and related in an ambiguous way to the unions. To Lenin's motto "first the party and then the revolution", she answered, "first the workers' control of the party, and then the revolution". What for Luxemburg was a problem of the social composition of the party, for Lenin was a problem of programme, or of the party's policy. For Lenin the workers' revolutionary direction was to be attained by tying militants to this programme and thus disciplining them to centralisation. Rosa and Lenin spoke to two different types of working class: they spoke against two different types of reformism.

The conditions for the organisation of a political labour movement in the USA were markedly different. It is in this light that we must evaluate DeLeon's position and the practice of the IWW. The relation between DeLeon and the IWW, however, must be preliminarily clarified. Although he was considered the ideologist of the movement and to a certain extent the one who anticipated the workers' council organisation, DeLeon actually occupied a minority position within the IWW. In fact, three years after its foundation, he was expelled from the IWW as a leader of a political party. In Detroit he founded another IWW increasingly yielding to the realities of the movement - above all in regard to the problems of the political struggle - and gradually moving away from any type of electoral approach. His fame among European revolutionary leaders, which earned him Lenin's homage after the revolution, was probably due to his approach's greater affinity with the European situation. Yet his major "theoretical" contributions were made precisely when he rejected the approach and traditions of the Second International in order to deal with the formidable reality of the class struggle in the United States. It is impossible to compare the maturity of the American entrepreneurial

class and its stage of productive organisation with the corresponding European ones. The USA was faced with a gigantic input of labour into directly productive labour. The greatest efforts were concentrated on the organisation of work: all the technical tools for an efficient apparatus were already available.

Humanitarian pretences and authoritarian arrogance were altogether alien to the American capitalist class. It was a mass process not merely limited to a few industrial islands. Such a society seemed to free of any residue of either productive or institutional backwardness. Unlike the European situation, the struggle between workers and owners, between working class and social owners, was not separated by a barrier of political institutions. An extremely high level of social cooperation, a global approach to the social division of labour, an inexhaustible ability to turn conflict into rationalisation and development, a control over the labour force exerted directly by the productive apparatus free from the mediation of unionism, a political use of mass mobility: all of these things conferred upon the American system striking characteristics such as to relegate Europe to the role of an annoying province. All political and civil liberties having been reduced to the one and only capitalist freedom - the freedom to work - led to a total identification between factory and society. Consequently, there was a major reduction of the political space understood in the traditional sense of representation and mediation. And all this took place under the pressure of a frontal workers' struggle.

The primitivism, superficiality, or obviousness of DeLeon's writings, so different from the pretentious chatter of so many European leaders, is a European distortion. DeLeon, and before him the "labour" agitators who led the IWW, understood very well how in that situation a revolutionary political line and organisation must take on specific mass characteristics and that therefore the institutionalisation of a vanguard was something altogether questionable. Even less practical was a centralised direction understood as a military organisation issuing orders through hierarchical channels. In fact, the relationship between direction and spontaneity was reversed, since it was a question of enabling the collective worker to act automatically or, rather, autonomously. This explains the programme concerning the struggle as the only collective organiser engaged in a gigantic cultural revolution base don a few principles: wage and working hours, wildcat strikes, no bargaining direct, direct violent mass action, no tie to agitation or to the mobility of the agitators and egalitarianism.

Perhaps the difference between DeLeon's Europeanism and the IWW leaders lies entirely in his desperate search for a "political" level above and beyond the pure mass struggle. This was probably where he was beyond the others. Along with all socialist intellectuals, he had begun by conceiving of that level in terms of elections. But the bum or Wobbly answered him that that was bourgeois stuff for people with glasses and goatees. For him, who was nothing but a proletarian, politics was a power relation with the boss. No Wobbly ever bothered to think about what the future society would be like. This, however, was of great interest to DeLeon - an intellectual who wanted to know what his office would look like after taking power: this is why he fantasised so much about the future society based on the unions. This is why Gramsci mistook him for a forerunner of the workers' councils.

Terms such as party, ideology and utopia, which were the passwords of the Second and later the Third International, are entirely foreign to the American class struggle. They surface in DeLeon only as secondary elements, squashed by a reality of social struggle imposed and willed by the innumerable nameless agitators who set in motion

all strata of the American proletariat. In DeLeon one witnesses this gradual loss of the autonomy of theory: the extinction of a certain political level. This is an instance where the analysis of a theoretician's writings gives us less than the description of the IWW struggles.

In addition to the refusal to bargain, what is most striking in the IWW's experience is the rejection of any institutionalisation of the conflict, the refusal to sign contracts so as to periodicise the struggle, and the refusal to consider the struggle as a factory affair seeking primarily to develop the struggles possibilities of social communication. What it resulted in was an organisation which, similar to the Italian Camere del Lavoro, was based on territorial principles. Yet all this is fundamentally similar to European struggles and the workers' councils approach. This common principle is in fact that the struggle and the organisation find their base by overturning the material condition in which capital places the proletariat: in Europe by overturning workers' aristocracies into political vanguards, and in the USA by overturning mobility into a vector of workers' organisation. Why was vagrancy the main charge through which the IWW cadres were thrown into jail? Why was the Wobbly agitator's work-style modeled on the existence of a mobile proletariat, today working in construction, tomorrow unemployed, the day after a seasonal picker, then a textile worker, or a waiter on trains? The organisers of the seasonal workers followed them in their migrations from the Mexican border to Canada. Thus, Ford's notion of a social wage originates from this proletarian approach to income which does not crystallise sectoral divisions, but has an egalitarian approach to income.

Therefore, the two pillars of the IWW organisation are internationalism and egalitarianism. What is completely foreign is what we call factory-power, precisely because a factory which was not the social factory was foreign to the Wobblies' world. Also foreign is any relation to skills. Thus, before the massification of labour was introduced by the assembly line, the mass worker was subjective reality shaped by Wobbly agitators. It was a programme of total confrontation with the social factory and social capital. Unlike all European examples, the history of American struggles is probably the only one in which the workers' movement does not seek either a remodernisation of productive structures nor an organisation of the productive forces more backward than that of capital itself in a given stage of development. Probably the workers' power projected by the Wobblies sought to leave the management of business to the bosses and let the working class determine socially necessary labour and income. This is why, rather than laying down a list of grievances to be dealt with at the bargaining table, they one-sidedly fixed wages and working hours, write them down on a piece of paper at the factory gates, and left it to the bosses to come down and take their note in order to respect it, thereby executing workers' orders. How many European workers, advised by intellectuals who claimed to be their friends and enticed by the idea of sitting behind a desk and of sending clerical workers to the benches, afterwards found themselves sitting in night-school desks after eight hours in the factory regretful for not having picked up a gun or for letting it be taken away from their hands by those very intellectuals?

Besides the anti-egalitarian ideology of labour, the main differences between the Wobbly's world and that of the European Bolshevik cadre lie precisely in the relationship between struggle, revolution and power. What was missing in the IWW is precisely the conception of the revolution as an act of management of power: the substitution of a state machine by another one. In other words, it is the dictatorship of

the proletariat and of the proletarian party over society. When did the communist model gain the upper hand over the Wobbly organisation? It should be pointed out that men like Foster, future secretary of the American Communist Party, came out of the IWW and that there he began his factional struggle in connection with the discussion over centralisation. But this was not yet the key point: the essential question was whether the IWW should have continued its anti-institutional practice, or whether it should have accepted the specific ground of bargaining, contractual norms, and, therefore, a more static and stable organisation. In other words, the issue was whether the IWW should have become a traditional union as the first step towards a convergence with the AFL, thus creating the premise for a unified labour organisation in the US and leaving the door open for a specific party organisation. As the cycle of struggles weakened, there arose problems of defence from repression so that resistance took priority over attack and the communist model appeared as the only possible solution. The American Communist Party succeeded in taking over a good part of the Wobblies' legacy and to integrate it in the great CIO operation of the Roosevelt period.

A final but extremely important problem is that of the relationship between the IWW and American blacks. Probably it is necessary here to go back to the period between the plantation era and the end of the Civil War in search of the vanguard which brought about the first struggles in the USA. The social figure at the centre of this first cycle of insubordination is the black run-away and later the black southern miner and the black worker in the first large steel mills in Birmingham, along with the white convict labourers. Neither the Knights of Labour nor the AFL approached these proletarian strata, much less the black masses reduced to peonage by the crisis of the plantation.

Capitalist repression at the turn of the century unleashed precisely against these strata. The IWW never contacted these masses precisely because the black labour power had never been free social labour power. It remained trapped in the poverty of the south and until World War II it was not allowed to flow into the great northern and eastern industrial arteries. If a black worked in a coal mine in Pennsylvania, Alabama or Kentucky he joined the United Mine Workers. The Western Federation of Labour, from which the IWW grew, was made out of the copper and iron miners of Utah, Arizona and Montana. Therefore the ten million immigrants the IWW attempted to organise successfully represent for American capital the river of human flesh which separated, and had to keep separated, the Southern blacks from the northern factories. A dyke of ten million white proletarians prevented the blacks from assaulting metropolitan explitation. The IWW is historically bound to this colossal defence effort on the part of white capital. This explains the function of the IWW revolutionary initiative within this tactical-strategic plan of US capital.

War and Revolution

In August 1914, the imperialist war broke the workers' movement into three large currents: the social democrats who advocated patriotism and class collaboration as a tactical passage towards the eventual management of society in the period of reconstruction; the revolutionary pacifist including the whole Zimmerwald movement who closed ranks on the issue of class resistance to war and super-exploitation; and the Bolsheviks, or rather Lenin and a few others, who foresaw the possibility of turning the imperialist war into a civil war. Here the Bolshevik militant took on his specific military role in the insurrection. There has always been talk about the social-democratic

betrayal. Actually, it was a lucid and cynical plan of co-management between capital and unions, between the bourgeois state and the social-democratic party. Soon after having voted for war credits, the "workers' representatives" in Germany created a series of joint organs, both at the plant as well as at more general levels as a first link of that chain which with the Arbeitsgemeinschaft of 1918, was to reach for the throat of the working class in order to choke the workers' council movement.

The war needed the workers' collaboration and the social democrats became all the more patriotic and insistent in order to present themselves as an alternative political group. Otherwise it is impossible to explain the rush and the determination with which employers and the social democratic party acted after 1918, nor the violent anti-union resentment of the workers' council cadres: during the war the unions had managed and guaranteed super-exploitation in the factories and had reported subordinate workers to the police. In the post-war period, the traditional organisation is assailed by a violent workers' revenge precisely in its role of political group of functionaries. The ideology of the workers' council movement, its generic accusation of the "professional political", the juxtaposition of the social figure of those on salaries and of the party functionary, i.e. of the intellectual in politics, ended up by engulfing both the right as well as the left. Rosa Luxemburg was not even able to participate in the first workers' council convention: only after long battle was she allowed in as an observer.

Workers' autonomy has posed the problem of the relationship between them and the committed group of professional revolutionaries. We do not know whether the destiny of Luxemburg - expelled from the convention of those workers' cadres which her writings had to a great extent helped bring about - and Lenin was to be tied to the fact that Lenin and his group had armed the workers, while the Spartacist group had continued to view the organisation as coordination and resistance, and the refusal to work as the only adequate workers' weapon. The essence of Leninism shifts from the relationship between spontaneity and the party to the relationship between the party and insurrection.

In Germany the key point is constituted by the presence of that ambiguous and contradictory formation which was the USPD: the independent social democratic party which included Kautskians and workers' council leaders, both Centrists and Spartacists. Unlike Liebknecht claimed, the ambiguity of the USPD did not lie in its participation in parliament (already in 1915 the Spartacist leader had insisted on the need for "extraparliamentary mass action" in the Spartakusbriefe), but in its mystification of workers' autonomy. The union cadres of the metal workers who organised the first strikes against the war in January 1918 were under the USPD umbrella, and it was within the USPD that the ideological battle concerning the councils movement took place.

The programme is well known: the transformation of workers' autonomy into counter-power, i.e. into the democratic organisation of wage workers, and the conception of the workers' councils as organs of workers' democratic power founded on direct representation. This was precisely the meaning of Kautsky's socialisation: the formal scheme of bourgeois democracy applied to workers' autonomy. It was essentially Dauemig's conception of workers' control of production, self-management, the building of alternate power which would de facto deprive the state of its power, a conception of working-class power only in terms of acceptance or refusal to labour, i.e. only in terms of workers' blackmail. Lenin attacked Dauemig very harshly precisely as the theorist of

mere workers' autonomy. Actually, Dauemig was the only one among the councils' leaders who wanted to reintroduce a political perspective, i.e. a tactic aimed at determining the specific passage of power relations.

It is a mistake to view the workers' council movement as a workers' critique of the forms of bourgeois institutional power. This may have been its form or its ideological aspect. The true revolutionary character of the workers' councils phase in Germany lies in the workers' power to provoke the crisis and to freeze capitalist development. This was understood very well by the old foxes in Versailles. The imposition of "that' treaty on Germany was practically dictated by the need to deprive the working class of the material bases of its very existence. Those who drafted the punitive clauses towards Germany operated precisely within the domain of the dual existence of the working class, i.e. as labour power inextricably bound to the material process of accumulation and as a class irreducibly antagonistic to that development. At that time Keynes, with his "grieved" appeals, was the strategist who looked much further and not the tactical politician who wanted above all to settle the score with the working class in the offensive.

In Versailles, international capital ran on a razor's edge, and risked halting the process of accumulation in its weakest zone: Germany. It blocked the process of development of its organic composition in order to halt the growth of the labour power commodity. It is in this sense that it entered the battlefield of the workers' struggle that the workers' council movement had helped to bring about.

Capital itself destroyed the monetary form of exchange relations: German inflation took away power in the form of wages from the hands of the class. It was the first time in history that the capitalist crisis did not take on the cyclic character but froze general development. This was the first capitalist crisis determined by the workers' impact on the process of value-creation.The future possibilities of the workers' council movement were all here. Versailles and the NEP were ultimately two parallel movements: the first was a decision of the capitalist brain to halt development in order to choke the growth of the class; the second was a decision of the workers' brain to stimulate development in order to reconstitute the material bases for class growth.

Hence the defence of the institution of the workers' councils was the veil that covered this deadly struggle between capital and labour. It was not difficult for the union bureaucracy to manage this defence in terms of democratisation of unions. Union democracy was as much against workers' autonomy as it was a part of it. Thus Noske, for instance, first headed Kiel's military-worker insubordinational movement by accepting the workers' council ideology, and then he went to Berlin to organise the White Guards. The councils movement immediately found itself on the defensive from December 1918 onwards. No sooner were they created than the councils had to be "defended": the workers' power thrust and the mass critique against "politics" were essentially defensive attitudes. The SPD threw into the councils movement - the movement of new representations - all its union and party functionaries, expert in motions, conventions and the parliamentary game. p> The councils picked up once again the theme of direct action after they lost the battle of majorities. Reformist politics won over the refusal to work. Old theoretical party brains such as Kautsky, Hilferding and Berstein, were left in the USPD to sow confusion in the field of workers' autonomy. They were quietly left to construct the utopia of labour democracy in the same way that capital let Rathenau fantasise about similar utopias. What was missing throughout the

councils period was the armed power of the working class which was not merely self-defence since during the war the revolutionary cadres in the army had simply preached resistance to the war or pacifism against militarism and at the end of the war had merely demanded the abolition of hierarchies. In Russia, on the other hand, the Bolsheviks had undertaken the task of forming a Red Army.

When union leaders and large employers formed an alliance at the end of 1918, they already had before them the complete picture of the mechanics of revolution in Russia. Thus their first concern was organising and managing demobilisation. The worker had to leave the guns they said - and return as soon as possible to his job. A specific programme of counterrevolutionary disarmament was managed with the same pacifist ideology, on the same anti-militarist ground of the Second International and to a great extent by the Zimmerwald participants. Mass strikes were admitted but insurrection was not.

Thus the workers' council movement failed not on the ground of workers' management of productive labour, but on that of the relation between mass strikes and insurrection, or between refusal to work and insurrection. We keep hearing that the workers' determination of the crisis from 1918 to 1923 prolonged the refusal to work as an ongoing crawling movement, without creating the party. Yet without its determination of the crisis and its struggle against development, the party is not revolutionary. Thus the failure of the workers' council movements did not postpone the problem of the relationship between autonomy and the party of professionals, but rather that of the relationship between struggle against development and insurrection, on the one hand, and armed workers' power on the other. We have seen in more recent history how many times insurrection has been, instead, the premise for a resumption of development. Leninism is perhaps the extreme limit reached by the insurrectional level and by the class autonomy where the party is still an acting minority.

Maoist thought has gone further, by conceiving of the class as the party, the party as the majority of the people, the party as social majority, and by moving the ground of insurrection from the brief coup d'etat to long-range war. With Maoism, insurrection has become a spontaneist term.

Chapter 2: Bordiga and Gramsci: What Kind of Party?

Antonio Gramsci - Unions and Councils

25: Unions and Councils

The proletarian organization which, as a global expression of the worker and peasant masses, is centred on the headquarters of the Confederation of Labour, is passing through a constitutional crisis that is similar in nature to the crisis in which the democratic-parliamentary State is vainly floundering. It is a crisis of power and a crisis of sovereignty. The solution of one will be the solution of the other, in the sense that, by resolving the problem of the will to power within the sphere of their own class organization, the workers will succeed in creating the organic framework of their own State and will victoriously counterpose it to the parliamentary State.

The workers feel that "their" organization has become such an enormously complex apparatus, that it has ended up obeying only laws of its own, inherent in its structure and complicated functioning, but alien to the masses who have acquired a consciousness of their historical mission as a revolutionary class. They sense that their will to power is not being expressed clearly and precisely enough through the current institutional hierarchies. They feel that even in their own house, in the house they built with tenacious and patient efforts, cementing it with blood and tears -- even in this house, the machine crushes man and bureaucracy crushes any creative spirit. A banal and verbose dilettantism vainly attempts to conceal the absence of clear ideas on the needs of industrial production and the failure to understand in any way the psychology of the proletarian masses. The workers are angered by this state of affairs, but individually they are powerless to change them. The words and intentions of individual men are too puny to stand up to the iron laws inherent in the bureaucratic structure of the trade-union apparatus.

The organization's "leaders" are oblivious of this profound and widespread crisis. The more obvious it becomes that the working class is not organized into forms which accord with its real historical structure, and is not mobilized into a formation that is ceaselessly adapting itself to the laws governing the inner process of the real

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historical development of the class itself, the more these "leaders" persist in their blindness and attempt to settle disputes and conflicts on a "legalistic" basis. Eminently bureaucratic in spirit, they believe that an objective condition, rooted in a psychology that develops out of living experiences on the shop floor, can be over-ruled by emotional speeches and slogans adopted unanimously in mass meetings stupefied by uproar and tedious oratorical performances. Today, they are making efforts to keep "abreast of the times"; to show that they too are capable of "tough thinking", they hark back to the old and out-worn syndicalist ideologies. They laboriously state over and over again that the Soviet is the same as the trade union, and that the current system of trade-union organization itself constitutes the framework of communist society and the system of forces which must embody the proletarian dictatorship.

In its current expression within the countries of Western Europe, the trade union is a kind of organization that not only differs essentially from the Soviet, but also differs considerably from the trade union as it is steadily developing in the Russian Communist Republic.

The craft unions, the Chambers of Labour, the industrial federations and the General Confederation of Labour are all types of proletarian organization specific to the period of history dominated by capital. It can be argued that they are in a sense an integral part of capitalist society, and have a function that is inherent in a régime of private property. In this period, when individuals are valued only to the extent that they own commodities and trade their property, the workers too have had to obey the iron laws of general necessity and have become traders in the only property they possess, their labour power and their professional skills. Since they are more exposed to the risks of competition, the workers have accumulated their property into ever larger and more comprehensive "firms"; they have created these enormous apparatuses for concentrating living labour, and have set prices and hours and disciplined the market. They have hired from outside or have thrown up from their own ranks a trusted

administrative personnel that is expert in this kind of transaction, capable of controlling market conditions, of drawing up contracts, assessing commercial risks and initiating economically profitable operations. The trade union has an essentially competitive, not communist, character. It cannot be the instrument for a radical renovation of society. It can provide the proletariat with skilled bureaucrats, and with technical experts on general industrial matters, but it cannot form the basis of proletarian power. It offers no scope for the selection of proletarian

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individuals who are capable and worthy of running society. It cannot throw up the hierarchies which will embody the *élan vital* and the rhythm of progress of communist society.

The proletarian dictatorship can only be embodied in a type of organization that is specific to the activity of producers, not wageearners, the slaves of capital. The factory Council is the nucleus of this organization. For all sectors of the labour process are represented in the Council, in proportion to the contribution each craft and each labour sector makes to the manufacture of the object the factory is producing for the collectivity. The Council is a class, a social institution. Its *raison d'être* lies in the labour process, in industrial production, i. e. in something permanent. It does not lie in wages or class divisions, i. e. in something transitory and, moreover, the very thing we are trying to supersede.

Hence the Council realizes in practice the unity of the working class; it gives the masses the same form and cohesion they adopt in the general organization of society.

The Factory Council is the model of the proletarian State. All the problems inherent in the organization of the proletarian State are inherent in the organization of the Council. In the one as in the other, the concept of citizen gives way to the concept of comrade. Collaboration in effective and useful production develops solidarity and multiplies bonds of affection and fraternity. Everyone is indispensable, everyone is at his post, and everyone has a function and a post. Even the most ignorant and backward of workers, even the most vain and "civil" of engineers, will eventually convince himself of this truth in the experience of factory organization. All eventually acquire a communist consciousness that enables them to comprehend what a great step forward the communist economy represents over the capitalist. The Council is the most effective organ for mutual education and for developing the new social spirit that the proletariat has successfully engendered from the rich and living experience of the community of labour. Whereas in the union, workers' solidarity was developed in struggle against capitalism, in suffering and sacrifice, in the Council this solidarity is a positive, permanent entity that is embodied in even the most trivial moments of industrial production. It is a joyous awareness of being an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system which, through useful work and the disinterested production of social wealth,

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asserts its sovereignty, and realizes its power and its freedom to create history.

The existence of an organization in which the proletariat is structured homogeneously as a productive class, and which encourages a free and spontaneous flowering of worthy and capable leaders and individuals, will have important and fundamental effects on the constitution and spirit that informs the activity of the trade

unions.

The Factory Council too is organized on a craft basis. On the shop floor the workers are divided into crews, and every crew constitutes a work unit (a craft unit). The Council itself is precisely made up of the delegates the workers elect on a craft (crew) basis in each shop. While the trade union is based on the individual, the Council is based on the concrete, organic unity of the craft as it is realized in the discipline of the industrial process. The crew (craft) senses its distinction within the homogeneous body of the class, but at the same time it feels enmeshed in the system of discipline and order that renders the development of production possible through the crew's functioning in a precise and exact manner. As an economic and political interest, the craft is absolutely indistinguishable from the body of the class; it is distinct from it as a technical interest and as a development of the particular instrument it uses in its job. In the same way, all industries are homogeneous and in solidarity in their aim to perfect the production, distribution and social accumulation of wealth; but each industry has distinct interests as far as the technical organization of its specific activity is concerned.

Once the Councils exist, they give the workers direct responsibility for production, provide them with an incentive to improve their work, instil a conscious and voluntary discipline, and create a producer's mentality -- the mentality of a creator of history. The workers will carry this new consciousness into the trade unions, which in place of the simple activity of the class struggle will dedicate themselves to the fundamental task of stamping economic life and work techniques with a new pattern; they will elaborate the form of economic life and professional technique proper to communist civilization. In this sense the unions, who are made up of the best and most conscious workers, will realize the highest moment of the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat: they will create the objective conditions in which classes will no longer be able to exist or re-emerge.

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This is what the industrial unions are doing in Russia. They have become the organs in which all the individual enterprises within a particular industry are amalgamated, linked up and articulated so that they form one, vast industrial unit. Wasteful competition is being eliminated, and the main services of administration, supply, distribution and storage are being unified into mammoth centres. Work systems, manufacturing secrets, and new applications become the immediate property of everyone in the industry. The multiplicity of bureaucratic and disciplinary functions inherent in private property relations and the individual firm are reduced to the bare industrial necessities. The application of trade-union principles to the textile industry in Russia has enabled the bureaucracy to be reduced from 100,000 employees to 3,500.

Factory organization will bind the class (the whole class) into a homogeneous and cohesive unit corresponding perfectly to the industrial process of production and controlling it by taking it over once and for all. In other words, organization based on the factory embodies the proletarian dictatorship, the communist State, that destroys class domination in the political superstructures and throughout its entire fabric.

Craft and industrial unions are the rigid backbone of the great proletarian body. They build on individual and local experience, store it up and so achieve that national equalization of the conditions of work and production on which communist equality is

concretely based.

But to make it possible to imprint on the unions this positive class and communist direction, it is essential that workers should direct all their will-power and faith to the building up and spreading of the Councils, i. e. to the organic unification of the working class. On this solid and homogeneous basis, all the higher structures of the dictatorship and the communist economy will flourish and develop.

Unsigned, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 11 October 1919, Vol. 1, No. 21.

52: Unions and Councils

The trade union is not a predetermined phenomenon. It *becomes* a determinate institution, i. e. it takes on a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and propose an aim that define it.

Objectively, the trade union is the form which labour as a commodity is bound to assume in a capitalist system, when it organizes itself in order to control the market. This form consists in an office staffed by functionaries, organizational technicians (when they can be called technicians), specialists (when they can be called specialists) in the art of concentrating and guiding the workers' forces in such a way as to establish a favourable balance between the working class and the power of capital.

The development of trade-union organization is characterized by two facts: 1. the union embraces an ever increasing number of workers; 2. the union concentrates and generalizes its scope until the movement's power and discipline is focused in a central office. This office becomes divorced from the masses it has regimented, and removes itself from the eddies and currents of fickle whims and foolish ambitions that are to be expected in the excitable broad masses. The union thus acquires the ability to negotiate agreements and take on responsibilities. In this way it obliges the employer to acknowledge a certain legality in his dealings with the workers, a legality that is conditional on his faith in the union's *solvency* and its capacity to secure respect for contracted obligations from the working masses.

The emergence of an industrial legality is a great victory for the working class, but it is not the ultimate and definitive victory. Industrial legality has improved the working class's standard of living but it is no more than a compromise -- a compromise which had to be made and must be supported until the balance of forces favours the working class. If the trade-union officials regard industrial legality as a necessary, but not a permanently necessary compromise; if they deploy all the means at the union's disposal to improve the balance of forces in favour of the working class; and if they carry out all the spiritual and material preparatory work that will be needed if the working class is to launch at

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any particular moment a victorious offensive against capital and subject it to its law -- then the trade union is a tool of revolution, and union discipline, even when used to make the workers respect industrial legality, is revolutionary discipline.

The relations which should prevail between the trade unions and Factory Councils need to be judged in the light of the following question: what is the nature and value of industrial legality?

The Council is the negation of industrial legality: it strives at all times to destroy it, to lead the working class to the conquest of industrial power and make it the source of industrial power. The union represents legality, and must aim to make its members respect that legality. The trade union is answerable to the industrialists, but only in so far as it is answerable to its own members: it guarantees to the worker and his family a continuous supply of work and wages, i. e. food and a roof over their heads. By virtue of its revolutionary spontaneity, the Factory Council tends to spark off the class war at any moment; while the trade union, by virtue of its bureaucratic form, tends to prevent class war from ever breaking out. The relations between the two institutions should be such that a capricious impulse on the part of the Councils could not result in a set-back or defeat for the working class; in other words, the Council should accept and assimilate the discipline of the union. They should also be such that the revolutionary character of the Council exercises an influence over the trade union, and functions as a reagent dissolving the union's bureaucracy and bureaucratism.

The Council strives at all times to break with industrial legality. The Council consists of the exploited and tyrannized masses who are obliged to perform servile labour: as such, it strives to universalize every rebellion and give a resolutive scope and value to each of its acts of power. The union, as an organization that is jointly responsible for legality, strives to universalize and perpetuate this legality. The relations between union and Council should create the conditions in which the break with legality, the working-class offensive, occurs at the most opportune moment for the working class, when it possesses that minimum of preparation that is deemed indispensable to a lasting victory.

The relations between unions and Councils cannot be stabilized by any other device than the following: the majority or a substantial

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number of the electors to the Council should be organized in unions. Any attempt to link the two institutions in a relation of hierarchical dependence can only lead to the destruction of both.

If the conception that sees the Councils merely as an instrument in the trade-union struggle takes material form in a bureaucratic discipline and a hierarchical structure in which the union has direct control over the Council, then the Council is sterilized as a force for revolutionary expansion -- as a form of the actual development of the proletarian revolution, tending spontaneously to create new modes of production and labour, new modes of discipline and, in the end, a communist society. Since the rise of the Council is a function of the position that the working class has achieved in the sphere of production, and a historical necessity for the working class, any attempt to subordinate it hierarchically to the union would sooner or later result in a clash between the two institutions. The Council's strength consists in the fact that it is in close contact -- indeed identified -- with the consciousness of the working masses, who are seeking their autonomous emancipation and wish to put on record their freedom of initiative in the creation of history. The masses as a whole participate in the activity of the Council, and gain a measure of self-respect in the process. Only a very restricted number of members participate in the activity of the trade union; its real strength lies in this fact, but this fact is also a weakness that cannot be put to the test without running very grave risks.

If, moreover, the unions were to lean directly on the Councils, not to dominate them, but to become their higher form, then they would reflect the Council's own tendency to break at all times with industrial legality and unleash the final phase of the class war. The union would lose its capacity to negotiate agreements, and would lose its role as an agent to regulate and discipline the impulsive forces of the working class.

If its members establish a revolutionary discipline in the union, a discipline which the masses see as being necessary for the triumph of the workers' revolution and not as slavery to capital, this discipline will undoubtedly be accepted and made its own by the Council. It will become a natural aspect of the Council's activity. If the union headquarters becomes a centre for revolutionary preparation, and appears as such to the masses by virtue of the campaigns it succeeds in launching, the men who compose it and the propaganda it issues, then its centralized and absolutist character will be seen by the masses as a major revolutionary strength, as one more (and a very important)

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condition for the success of the struggle to which they are committed all the way.

In Italian conditions, the trade-union official sees industrial legality as a permanent state of affairs. Too often he defends it from the same perspective as the proprietor. He sees only chaos and wilfulness in everything that happens amongst the working masses. He does not universalize the worker's act of rebellion against capitalist discipline as rebellion; he perceives only the physical act, which might in itself be trivial. Thus the story of the "porter's raincoat" has been as widely disseminated and has been interpreted by stupid journalists in the same way as the myth of the "socialization of women in Russia". 1 In these conditions, the trade-union discipline can be nothing other than a service rendered to capital; in these conditions any attempt to subordinate the Councils to the trade unions can only be judged as reactionary.

The communists would like the revolutionary act to be, as far as possible, a conscious and responsible act. Hence they would like to see the choice of the moment in which to launch the working-class offensive (to the extent that such a moment can be chosen) resting in the hands of the most conscious and responsible section of the working class -- the section organized in the Socialist Party and playing the most active part in the life of the organization. For this reason, the communists could not possibly want the union to lose any of its disciplinary energy and systematic centralization.

By forming themselves into permanently organized groups within the trade unions and factories, the communists need to import into these bodies the ideas, theses and tactics of the IIIrd International; they need to exert an influence over union discipline and determine its aims; they need to influence the decisions of the Factory Councils, and transform the rebellious impulses sparked off by the conditions that capitalism has created for the working class into a revolutionary consciousness and creativity. Since they bear the heaviest historical responsibility, the communists in the Party have the greatest interest in evoking, through their ceaseless activity, relations of interpenetration and natural interdependence between the various working-class institutions. It is these relations that leaven discipline and organization with a revolutionary spirit.

Unsigned, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 12 June 1920, Vol. II, No. 5.

Antonio Gramsci 1919

Workers' democracy

A nagging problem afflicts every socialists who feels alive the sense of historic responsibility which hangs over the working class and the party which represents the critical and functioning consciousness of the mission of this class.

How to control the immense social forces which the war has unleashed? How to discipline them and give them a political form which contains in itself the virtue of developing normally, of integrating itself continuously, until it becomes the framework of the socialist state in which the dictator of the proletariat will be embodied. How to weld the present to the future, satisfying the urgent necessities of the present and working usefully to create and "anticipate" the future?

This article aims to be a stimulus to thought and work; it aims to be an invitation to the best and most conscious workers to reflect and, each in the sphere of his own competence and his own action, to collaborate on the solution of the problem, focussing the attention of comrades and associations. Only from a united and common work of clarification, persuasion and reciprocal education will the concrete action of construction be born.

The socialist state potentially already exists in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class. Connecting these institutions to each other, coordinating them and subordinating them in a hierarchy of competences and powers, strongly focussing them, while respecting the necessary autonomy and flexibility, means creating from now a true and proper workers' democracy, in effective and active counterposition to the bourgeois state, already prepared to replace the bourgeois state in all of its essential functions of management and control of national property.

The labour movement is today directed by the Socialist Party and by Confederation of Labour; but the exercise of the social power of the Socialist Party and of the Confederation takes place, for the major mass of workers, indirectly, by force of prestige and of enthusiasm, by authoritarian pressure, thus by inertia. The sphere of prestige of the party expands daily, reaches working classes hitherto untouched, implants the consensus and desire to work vigorously for the coming of communism in groups and individuals up to now absent from the political struggle. It is necessary to give a political form and a permanent discipline to these disordered and chaotic energies, to absorb, assemble and empower them, to make of the proletarian and semiproletarian class an organized society which educates itself, which makes its own experience, which acquires a responsible consciousness of the duties which fall to the classes come to state power.

The Socialist Party and the trade unions cannot absorb the whole working class, except through the work of years and decades. They do not identify immediately with the proletarian state; in the communist republics in fact, they continue to operate independently of the state, as institutes of propulsion (the party) or of control and partial realization (the unions). The party must continue to be the organ of communist education, the focus of the faith, the repository of doctrine, the supreme power which harmonizes and brings to a point the organized and disciplined forces of the working and peasant class. Precisely to rigidly develop this its office, the party cannot throw open the doors to an invasion of new members, not used to the exercise of responsibility and discipline.

But the social life of the working class is rich with institutions, it articulates itself in multiple activities. Precisely these institutions and these activities need to be developed,

organized together, connected in a vast and flexibly articulated system which absorbs and disciplines the whole working class.

The workshop with its internal commissions, the socialist circles, the peasant communities, are the centres of proletarian life in which it is necessary to work directly.

The internal commissions are organs of workers' democracy which should be freed from the limits imposed by owners, and in which new life and energy should be inspired. Today the commissions limit the power of the capitalist in the factory and perform functions of arbitration and discipline. Developed and enriched, they should tomorrow be organs of proletarian power which will replace the capitalist in all his useful functions of direction and administration.

Already workers should proceed to the election of vast assemblies of delegates, chosen from the best and most conscious comrades, on the watchword: "All power in the workshop to the workshop committee," matched to the other: "All state power to the worker and peasant councils."

A vast field of concrete revolutionary propaganda would open for communists organized in the party and in the district circles. The circles, in agreement with the urban sections, should make a census of the labour forces of the area, and become the seat of the district council of the workshop delegates, the ganglion which ties and concentrates the proletarian energies of the district. The electoral systems can be varied according to the size of the workshops: however, the aim should be to elect one delegate for every 15 workers divided by category (as is done in English workshops), arriving, by gradual elections, at a committee of factory delegates which includes representatives of the whole labour complex (blue collar, white collar, technical). The district committee should also aim to include delegates from the other categories of workers living in the district: catering, haulage, trams, railways, refuse, white collar, self-employed, shopwork, etc.

The district committee should be an emanation of the whole working class living in the district, legitimate and authoritative, able to impose discipline, invested with power, spontaneously delegated, and order the immediate and complete cessation of all work in the whole district.

The district committees will be enlarged in urban commissions, controlled and disciplined by the Socialist Party and by the trade federations.

Such a system of workers' democracy (integrated with equivalent peasant organizations) would give a form and a discipline to the masses, would be a magnificent school of political and administrative experience, would assemble the masses up to the last man, habituating them to tenacity and perseverance, habituating them to consider themselves an army in the field which needs a firm cohesion if it does not want to be destroyed and reduced to slavery. Every factory would form one or more regiments of this army, with its corporals, with its communication services, with its officers, with its general staff, delegated powers for free election, not imposed authoritarianly Through the rallies, held inside the workshop, with the unceasing work of propaganda and persuasion developed by the most conscious elements, a radical transformation of the workers' psychology would take place, would render the masses better prepared for and capable of the exercise of power, would diffuse a consciousness of the duties and rights of the comrade and of the worker, concrete and efficient because spontaneously generated by the living historical experience.

We have already said: these rapid notes are put forward only to stimulate thought and action. Every aspect of the problem deserves a vast and deep treatment, clarifications, subsidiary and coordinated integration. But the concrete and complete solution of the problems of socialist life can be given only by communist practice: discussion in common, which sympathetically modifies consciousnesses uniting them and filling them with working enthusiasm. To tell the truth, to arrive together at the truth, is to achieve a communist and revolutionary act. The formula "dictatorship of the proletariat" must cease to be only a formula, an occasion for outbursts of revolutionary phraseology. Whoever wants the ends, should want the means. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the inauguration of a new state, typically proletarian, in which combine the institutional experiences of the oppressed class, in which the social life of the worker and peasant class becomes a widespread and strongly organized system. This state is not improvised: the Russian Bolshevik communists have worked for eight months to propagate and make concrete the watchword: all power to the soviets, and the soviets have been known to Russian workers since 1905. The communists must treasure the Russian experience and save time and effort: the work of reconstruction will require for itself much time and much effort, to which every day and every act must be destined.

Amadeo Bordiga. 1920

Seize Power or Seize the Factory?

Source: *Il Soviet*, 22 February 1920, Vol.III, No.7.

The working-class disturbances of the past few days in Liguria have seen yet another example of a phenomenon that for some time now has been repeated with some frequency, and that deserves to be examined as a symptom of a new level of consciousness among the working masses.

Instead of abandoning their jobs, the workers have so to speak taken over their plants and sought to operate them for their own benefit, or more precisely without the top managers being present in the plant. Above all, this indicates that the workers are fully aware that the strike is not always the best weapon to use, especially under certain circumstances.

The economic strike, through the immediate harm it inflicts on the worker himself, derives its utility as a defensive weapon for the worker from the harm the work-stoppage inflicts on the industrialist by cutting back the output which belongs to him.

This is the state of affairs under normal conditions in the capitalist economy, when competition and price-cutting force a continual increase in production itself. Today the profiteers of industry, in particular the engineering industry, are emerging from an exceptional period in which they were able to amass enormous profits for a minimum of effort. During the war the State supplied them with raw materials and coal and, at the same time, acted as sole and reliable purchaser. Furthermore, through its militarization of factories, the State itself undertook to impose a rigorous discipline on the working masses. What more favourable conditions could there be for a fat profit? But now these people are no longer disposed to deal with all the difficulties arising from shortages of

coal and raw materials, from the instability of the market and the fractiousness of the working masses. In particular, they are not disposed to put up with modest profits which are roughly the same or perhaps a bit below their pre-War level.

This is why they are not worried by strikes. Indeed they positively welcome them, while mouthing a few protests about the absurd claims and insatiability of the workers. The workers have understood this, and through their action of taking over the factory and carrying on working instead of striking, they are making it clear that it is not that they have no wish to work, but that they have no wish to work the way the bosses tell them to. They no longer want to be exploited and work for the benefit of the bosses; they want to work for their own benefit, i.e. in the interests of the work-force alone.

This new consciousness that is emerging more clearly every day should be held in the highest regard; however, we would not want it to be led astray by vain illusions.

It is rumoured that factory councils, where they were in existence, functioned by taking over the management of the workshops and carrying on the work. We would not like the working masses to get hold of the idea that all they need do to take over the factories and get rid or the capitalists is set up councils. This would indeed be a dangerous illusion. The factory will be conquered by the working class – and not only by the workforce employed in it, which would be too weak and non-communist – only after the working class as a whole has seized political power. Unless it has done so, the Royal Guards, military police, etc. – in other words, the mechanism of force and oppression that the bourgeoisie has at its disposal, its political power apparatus – will see to it that all illusions are dispelled.

It would be better if these endless and useless adventures that are daily exhausting the working masses were all channelled, merged and organized into one great, comprehensive upsurge aimed directly at the heart of the enemy bourgeoisie.

Only a communist party should and would be able to carry out such an undertaking. At this time, such a party should and would have no other task than that of directing all its activity towards making the working masses increasingly conscious of the need for this grand political attack – the only more or less direct route to the take-over of the factory, which if any other route is taken may never fall into their hands at all.

Amadeo Bordiga. 1921

Party and class action

Source: “communiste program”, No. 2, march 1976, Translated from “Partito e azione di classe”, Rassegna Comunista, Year I, No. 4, May 31, 1921.

In a previous article where we elaborated certain fundamental theoretical concepts, we have shown not only that there is no contradiction in the fact that the political party of the working class, the indispensable instrument in the struggles for the emancipation of this class, includes in its ranks only a part, a minority, of the class, but we also have shown that we cannot speak of a class in historical movement without the existence of a party which has a precise consciousness of this movement and its aims, and which places itself at the vanguard of this movement in the struggle.

A more detailed examination of the historical tasks of the working class on its revolutionary course, both before and after the overthrow of the power of the exploiters, will only confirm the imperative necessity of a political party which must direct the whole struggle of the working class. In order to have a precise, tangible idea of the technical necessity of the party, we should first consider – even if it may seem illogical – the tasks that the proletariat must accomplish after having come to power and after having wrenched the control of the social machine from the bourgeoisie.

After having conquered control of the state the proletariat must undertake complex functions. In addition to replacing the bourgeoisie in the direction and administration of public matters, it must construct an entirely new and different administrative and governmental machinery, with immensely more complex aims than those comprising the "governmental art" of today. These functions require a regimentation of individuals capable of performing diverse functions, of studying various problems, and of applying certain criteria to the different sectors of collective life: these criteria are derived from the general revolutionary principles and correspond to the necessity which compels the proletarian class to break the bonds of the old regime in order to set up new social relationships.

It would be a fundamental mistake to believe that such a degree of preparation and specialisation could be achieved merely by organising the workers on a trade basis according to their traditional functions in the old regime. Our task will not be to eliminate the contribution of technical competence previously furnished by the capitalist or by elements closely linked to him in order to replace them, factory by factory, by the training and experience of the best workers. We will instead have to confront tasks of a much more complex nature which require a synthesis of political, administrative and military preparation. Such a preparation, which must exactly correspond to the precise historical tasks of the proletarian revolution, can be guaranteed only by the political party; in effect the political party is the only organism which possesses on one hand a general historical vision of the revolutionary process and of its necessities and on the other hand a strict organisational discipline ensuring the complete subordination of all its particular functions to the final general aim of the class.

A party is that collection of people who have the same general view of the development of history, who have a precise conception of the final aim of the class they represent, and who have prepared in advance a system of solutions to the various problems which the proletariat will have to confront when it becomes the ruling class. It is for this reason that the rule of the class can only be the rule of the party. After these brief considerations, which can very evidently be seen in even a superficial study of the Russian Revolution, we shall now consider the phase preceding the proletariat's rise to power in order to demonstrate that the revolutionary action of the class against bourgeois power can only be a party action.

It is first of all evident that the proletariat would not be mature enough to confront the extremely difficult problems of the period of its dictatorship, if the organ that is indispensable in solving these problems, the party, had not begun long before to constitute the body of its doctrine and experiences.

The party is the indispensable organ of all class action even if we consider the immediate necessities of the struggles which must culminate in the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie. In fact we cannot speak of a genuine class action (that is

an action that goes beyond the trade interests and immediate concerns) unless there is a party action.

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Basically, the task of the proletarian party in the historical process is set forth as follows.

At all times the economic and social relationships in capitalist society are unbearable for the proletarians, who consequently are driven to try to overcome them. Through complex developments the victims of these relationships are brought to realise that, in their instinctive struggle against sufferings and hardships which are common to a multitude of people, individual resources are not enough. Hence they are led to experiment with collective forms of action in order to increase, through their association, the extent of their influence on the social conditions imposed upon them. But the succession of these experiences all along the path of the development of the present capitalist social form leads to the inevitable conclusion that the workers will achieve no real influence on their own destinies until they have united their efforts beyond the limits of local, national and trade interests and until they have concentrated these efforts on a far-reaching and integral objective which is realised in the overthrow of bourgeois political power. This is so because as long as the present political apparatus remains in force, its function will be to annihilate all the efforts of the proletarian class to escape from capitalist exploitation.

The first groups of proletarians to attain this consciousness are those who take part in the movements of their class comrades and who, through a critical analysis of their efforts, of the results which follow, and of their mistakes and disillusions, bring an ever-growing number of proletarians onto the field of the common and final struggle which is a struggle for power, a political struggle, a revolutionary struggle.

Thus at first an ever-increasing number of workers become convinced that only the final revolutionary struggle can solve the problem of their living conditions. At the same time there are increasing numbers who are ready to accept the inevitable hardships and sacrifices of the struggle and who are ready to put themselves at the head of the masses incited to revolt by their suffering, all in order to rationally utilise their efforts and to assure their full effectiveness.

The indispensable task of the party therefore is presented in two ways, that is first as a factor of consciousness and then as a factor of will. The first results in the theoretical conception of the revolutionary process that must be shared by all its adherents; the second brings a precise discipline which secures the co-ordination and thus the success of the action.

Obviously this strengthening of the class energies has never been and can never be a securely progressive, continuous process. There are standstills, setbacks and disbandings. Proletarian parties often lose the essential characteristics which they were in the process of forming and their aptitude for fulfilling their historical tasks. In general, under the very influence of particular phenomena of the capitalist world, parties often abandon their principal function which is to concentrate and channel the impulses originating from the movement of the various groups, and to direct them towards the single final aim of the revolution. Such parties are satisfied with immediate and transitory solutions and satisfactions. They degenerate in their theory and practice to the point of admitting that the proletariat can find conditions of advantageous

equilibrium within the capitalist regime, and they adopt as their political aim objectives which are merely partial and immediate, thereby beginning on their way towards class collaboration.

These phenomena of degeneration reached their peak with the great World War. After this a period of healthy reaction has followed: the class parties inspired by revolutionary directives – which are the only parties that are truly class parties – have been reconstructed throughout the world and are organising themselves into the Third International, whose doctrine and action are explicitly revolutionary and "maximalist".

Thus in this period, which everything indicates will be decisive, we can see again a movement of revolutionary unification of the masses, of organisation of their forces for the final revolutionary action. But once again, far from having the immediate simplicity of a rule, this situation poses difficult tactical problems; it does not exclude partial or even serious failure, and it raises questions which so greatly impassion the militants of the world revolutionary organisation.

* * *

Now that the new International has systematised the framework of its doctrine it musty still draw up a general plan of its tactical methods. In various countries a series of questions has arisen from the communist movement and tactical problems are on the order of the day. Once it has been established that the political party is an indispensable organ of the revolution; once it no longer can be a point of debate that the party can only be a part of the class (and this point has been settled in the theoretical resolutions of the Second World Congress, which formed the point of departure of the previous article) (1) then the following problem remains to be solved: we must know more precisely how large the party organisation must be and what relationship it must have with the masses which it organises and leads.

There exists – or there is said to exist – a trend which wishes to have perfectly pure "small parties" and which would almost take pleasure in moving away from contact with the great masses, accusing them of having little revolutionary consciousness and capabilities. This tendency is severely criticised and is defined as deft opportunism. This label however seems to us to be more demagogic than justified; it should rather be reserved for those tendencies that deny the function of the political party and pretend that the masses can be organised on a vast scale for revolution by means of purely economic and syndical forms of organisation.

What we must deal with therefore is a more thorough examination of the relationship between the masses and the party. We have seen that the party is only a part of the working class, but how are we to determine the numerical size of this "proportion"? For us if there is a proof of "voluntarism" and therefore of typical anti-Marxist opportunism (and today opportunism can only mean heresy) it is the pretension of establishing such a numerical relationship as an a priori rule of organisation; that is to say of establishing that the communist party must have in its ranks, or as sympathisers, a certain number of workers which is either greater or less than a particular given percentage of the proletarian mass.

It would be a ridiculous mistake to judge the process of formation of communist parties, which proceeds through splits and mergers, according to a numerical criterion, that is to say to cut down the size of the parties which are too large and to forcibly add to the numbers of the parties which are too small. This would be in effect not to

understand that this formation must be guided instead by qualitative and political norms and that it develops in a very large part through the dialectical repercussions of history. It cannot be defined by organisational rules which would pretend that the parties should be moulded into what is considered to be desirable and appropriate dimensions.

What can be stated as an unquestionable basis for such a discussion on tactics is that it is preferable that the parties should be numerically as large as possible and that they should succeed in attracting around them the largest possible strata of the masses. No one among the communists ever laid down as a principle that the communist party should be composed of a small number of people shut up in an ivory tower of political purity. It is indisputable that the numerical force of the party and the enthusiasm of the proletariat to gather around the party are favourable revolutionary conditions; they are unmistakable signs of the maturity of the development of proletarian energies and nobody would ever wish that the communist parties should not progress in that way.

Therefore there is no definite or definable numerical relationship between the party membership and the great mass of the workers. Once it is established that the party assumes its function as a minority of the class, the inquiry as to whether this should be a large minority or a small minority is the ultimate in pedantry. It is certain that as long as the contradictions and internal conflicts of capitalist society, from which the revolutionary tendencies originate, are only in their first stage of development, as long as the revolution appears to be far away, then we must expect this situation: the class party, the communist party, will necessarily be composed of small vanguard groups who have a special capacity to understand the historical perspective, and that section of the masses who will understand and follow it cannot be very large. However, when the revolutionary crisis becomes imminent, when the bourgeois relations of production become more and more intolerable, the party will see an increase in its ranks and in the extent of its following within the proletariat.

If the present period is a revolutionary one, as all communists are firmly convinced, then it follows that we must have large parties which exercise a strong influence over broad sections of the proletariat in every country. But wherever this aim has not yet been realised in spite of undeniable proofs of the acuteness of the crisis and the imminence of its outburst, the causes of this deficiency are very complex; therefore it would be extremely frivolous to conclude that the party, when it is too small and with little influence, must be artificially extended by fusing with other parties or fractions of parties which have members that are supposedly linked to the masses. The decision as to whether members of other organisations should be admitted into the ranks of the party, or on the contrary whether a party which is too large should eliminate part of its membership, cannot stem from arithmetical considerations or from a childish statistical disappointment.

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The formation of the communist parties, with the exception of the Russian Bolshevik Party, has grown at a very accelerated pace in Europe as well as outside of Europe because the war has opened the door, at a very accelerated rate, to a crisis of the system. The proletarian masses cannot attain a firm political consciousness in a gradual way; on the contrary they are driven here and there by the necessities of the revolutionary struggle, as if they were tossed by the waves of a stormy sea. There has

continued to survive, on the other hand, the traditional influence of social- democratic methods, and the social-democratic parties themselves are still on the scene in order to sabotage the process of clarification, to the greatest advantage of the bourgeoisie.

When the problem of how to solve the crisis reaches the critical point and when the question of power is posed to the masses, the role of the social-democrats becomes extremely evident, for when the dilemma proletarian dictatorship or bourgeois dictatorship is posed and when choice can no longer be avoided, they choose complicity with the bourgeoisie. However when the situation is maturing but not yet fully developed, a considerable section of the masses remain under the influence of these social-traitors. And in those cases when the probability of revolution has the appearance, but only the appearance, of diminishing, or when the bourgeoisie unexpectedly begins to unfurl its forces of resistance, it is inevitable that the communist parties will temporarily lose ground in the field of organisation and in their leadership of the masses.

Given the present unstable situation, it is possible that we will see such fluctuations in the generally secure process of development of the revolutionary International. It is unquestionable that communist tactics must try to face these unfavourable circumstances, but it is no less certain that it would be absurd to hope to eliminate them by mere tactical formulas, just as it would be excessive to draw pessimistic conclusions from these circumstances.

In the abstract hypothesis of the continuous development of the revolutionary energies of the masses, the party sees its numerical and political forces increase in a continuous way, quantitatively growing but remaining qualitatively the same, inasmuch as the number of communists rises, in relation to the total number of proletarians. However in the actual situation the diverse and continually changing factors of the social environment act upon the mood of the masses in a complex way; the communist party, which is made up of those who more clearly perceive and understand the characteristics of the historical development, nevertheless does not cease to be an effect of this development and thus it cannot escape fluctuations in the social atmosphere. Therefore, although it acts constantly as a factor of revolutionary acceleration, there is no method it can use, however refined it may be, which can force or reverse the situation in regards to its fundamental essence.

The worst remedy which could be used against unfavourable consequences of situations, however, would be to periodically put on trial the theoretical and organisational principles that are the very basis of the party, with the objective of enlarging its zone of contact with the masses. In situations where the revolutionary inclinations of the masses are weakening, this movement to “bring the party towards the masses”, as some call it, is very often equivalent to changing the very nature of the party, thus depriving it of the very qualities that would enable it to be a catalyst capable of influencing the masses to resume their forward movement.

The conclusions in regard to the precise character of the revolutionary process, which are derived from the doctrine and historical experience, can only be international and thus result in international standards. Once the communist parties are solidly founded on these conclusions, then their organisational physiognomy must be considered to be established and it must be understood that their ability to attract the masses and to give them their full class power depends on their adherence to a strict discipline regarding the program and the internal organisation.

The communist party possesses a theoretical consciousness confirmed by the movement's international experiences, which enables it to be prepared to confront the demands of revolutionary struggle. And because of this, even though the masses partially abandon it during certain phases of its life, it has a guarantee that their support will return when they are confronted with revolutionary problems for which there can be no other solution than that inscribed in the party's program. When the necessities of revolutionary action reveal the need for a centralised and disciplined organ of leadership, then the communist party, whose constitution will have obeyed these principles, will put itself at the head of the masses in movement.

The conclusion that we wish to draw is that the criteria which we must use as a basis to judge the efficiency of the communist parties must be quite different from an a posteriori estimate of their numerical forces as compared with those of the other parties which claim to represent the proletariat. The only criteria by which to judge this efficiency are the precisely defined theoretical bases of the party's program and the rigid internal discipline of all its organisational sections and of all its members; only such a discipline can guarantee the utilisation of everyone's work for the greatest success of the revolutionary cause. Any other form of intervention in the composition of the party which is not logically derived from the precise application of these principles can only lead to illusory results and would deprive the class party of its greatest revolutionary strength: this strength lies precisely in the doctrinal and organisational continuity of all its propaganda and all its action, in its ability do state in advance, how the process of the final struggle between classes will develop and in its ability to give itself the type of organisation which responds to the needs of this decisive phase.

During the war, this continuity was irretrievably lost throughout the world and the only thing to do was to start again from the beginning. The birth of the Communist International as a historical force has materialised, on the basis of a perfectly clear and decisive revolutionary experience, the lines on which the proletarian movement could reorganise itself. The first condition for a revolutionary victory for the world proletariat is consequently the attainment of the organisational stabilisation of the International, which could give the masses throughout the world a feeling of determination and certitude, and which could win the support of the masses while making it possible to wait for them whenever it is indispensable that the development of the crisis still should act upon them, that is when it is unavoidable that they still experiment with the insidious advice of the social-democrats. There do not exist any better recipes for escaping this necessity.

The Second Congress of the Third International understood these necessities. At the beginning of a new epoch which must lead to revolution, it had to establish the points of departure of an international work of organisation and revolutionary preparation. It would have perhaps been preferable for the Congress, instead of dealing with the different themes in the order that they were treated in the theses – all of which dealt with theory and tactics at the same time – to have established first the fundamental basis of the theoretical and programmatic conception of communism, since the organisation of all adhering parties must be primarily based on the acceptance of these theses. The Congress then would have formulated the fundamental rules of action which all members must strictly observe on the trade-union, the agrarian, and the colonial questions and so on. However, all this is dealt with in the body of resolutions

adopted by the Second Congress and is excellently summarised in the theses on the conditions of admission of the parties (2).

It is essential to consider the application of these conditions of admission as an initial constitutive and organisational act of the International, that is as an operation which must be accomplished once and for all in order to draw all organised or organisable forces out of the chaos into which the political proletarian movement had fallen, and to organise these forces into the new International.

All steps should be taken without further delay in order to organise the international movement on the basis of these obligatory international standards. For, as we have said before, the great strength which must guide the International in its task of propelling the revolutionary energies is the demonstration of the continuity of its thought and action towards a precise aim that will one day appear clearly in the eyes of the masses, polarising them around the vanguard party, and providing the best chances for the victory of the revolution.

If, as a result of this initial – though organisationally decisive – systematisation of the movement, parties in certain countries have an apparently small membership, then it can be very useful to study the causes of such a phenomenon. However it would be absurd to modify the established organisational standards and to redefine their application with the aim of obtaining a better numerical relationship of the Communist Party to the masses or to other parties. This would only annihilate all the work accomplished in the period of organisation and would make it useless; it would necessitate beginning the work of preparation all over again, with the supplementary risk of several other starts. Thus this method would only result in losing time instead of saving it.

This is all the more true if the international consequences of this method are considered. The result of making the international organisational rules revocable and of creating precedents for accepting the "remoulding" of parties – as if a party was like a statue which could be recast after not turning out well the first time — would be to obliterate all the prestige and authority of the "conditions" that the International laid down for the parties and individuals that wished to join. This would also indefinitely delay the stabilisation of the staff of the revolutionary army, since new officers could constantly aspire to enter while "retaining the privileges of their rank".

Therefore it is not necessary to be in favour of large — or small- parties; it is not necessary to advocate that the orientation of certain parties should be reversed, under the pretext that they are not "mass parties". On the contrary, we must demand that all communist parties be founded on sound organisational, programmatic, and tactical directives which crystallise the results of the best experiences of the revolutionary struggle on the international scale.

These conclusions, although it is difficult to make it evident without very long considerations and quotations of facts taken from the life of the proletarian movement, do not spring from an abstract and sterile desire to have pure, perfect and orthodox parties. Instead they originate from a desire to fulfil the revolutionary tasks of the class party in the most efficient and secure way.

The party will never find such a secure support from the masses, the masses will never find a more secure defender of their class consciousness and of their power, than when the past actions of the party have shown the continuity of its movement towards revolutionary aims, even without the masses or against them at certain unfavourable

moments. The support of the masses can be securely won only by a struggle against their opportunist leaders. This means that where non-communist parties still exert an influence among the masses, the masses must be won over by dismantling the organisational network of these parties and by absorbing their proletarian elements into the solid and well-defined organisation of the Communist Party. This is the only method which can give useful solutions and can assure practical success. It corresponds exactly to Marx's and Engels' positions towards the dissident movement of the Lassalians.

That is why the Communist International must look with extreme mistrust at all groups and individuals who come to it with theoretical and tactical reservations. We may recognise that this mistrust cannot be absolutely uniform on the international level and that certain special conditions must be taken into account in countries where only limited forces actually place themselves on the true terrain of communism. It remains true, however, that no importance should be given to the numerical size of the party when it is a question of whether the conditions of admission should be made more lenient or more severe for individuals and, with still more reason, for groups who are more or less incompletely won over to the theses and methods of the International. The acquisition of these elements would not be the acquisition of positive forces; instead of bringing new masses to us, this would result in the risk of jeopardising the clear process of winning them over to the cause of the party. Of course we must want this process to be as rapid as possible, but this wish must not urge us on to incautious actions which might, on the contrary, delay the final solid and definitive success.

It is necessary to incorporate certain norms which have constantly proved to be very efficient into the tactics of the International, into the fundamental criteria which dictate the application of these tactics, and into the solution of the complex problems which arise in practice. These are: an absolutely uncompromising attitude towards other parties, even the closest ones, keeping in mind the future repercussions beyond immediate desires to hasten the development of certain situations; the discipline that is required of members, taking into consideration not only their present observance of this discipline but also their past actions, with the maximum mistrust in regard to political conversions; a consideration of the past accountability of individuals and groups, in place of recognising their right to join or to leave the communist army whenever they please. All this, even if it may seem to enclose the party in too narrow a circle for the moment, is not a theoretical luxury but instead it is a tactical method which very securely ensures the future.

Countless examples would show that last-minute revolutionaries are out of place and useless in our ranks. Only yesterday they had reformist attitudes that were dictated by the special conditions of the period and today they have been led to follow the fundamental communist directive because they are influenced by their often too optimistic considerations about the imminence of the revolution. Any new wavering in the situation — and in a war who can say how many advances and retreats would occur before the final victory – will be sufficient to cause them to return to their old opportunism, thus jeopardising at the same time the contents of our organisation.

The international communist movement must be composed of those who not only are firmly convinced of the necessity of revolution and are ready to struggle for it at the cost of any sacrifice, but who also are committed to act on the revolutionary terrain even when the difficulties of the struggle reveal that their aim is harder to reach and further away than they had believed.

At the moment of the intense revolutionary crisis we shall act on the sound base of our international organisation, polarising around us the elements who today are still hesitating, and defeating the social-democratic parties of various shades.

If the revolutionary possibilities are less immediate we will not run the risk, even for a single moment, of letting ourselves be distracted from our patient work of preparation in order to retreat to the mere solving of immediate problems, which would only benefit the bourgeoisie.

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Another aspect of the tactical problem which the communist parties must solve is that of choosing the moment at which the calls for action must be launched, whether it is a secondary action or the final one.

This is why the tactics of the offensive of communist parties are passionately discussed today; these consist of organising and arming the party militants and the close sympathisers, and of manoeuvring them at the opportune moment in offensive actions aiming at rousing the masses in a general movement, or even at accomplishing spectacular actions in response to the reactionary offensive of the bourgeoisie.

On this question too there are generally two opposing positions neither of which a communist would probably support.

No communist can harbour prejudices towards the use of armed actions, retaliations and even terror or deny that these actions, which require discipline and organisation, must be directed by the communist party. Just as infantile is the conception that the use of violence and armed actions are reserved for the “Great Day” when the supreme struggle for the conquest of power will be launched. In the reality of the revolutionary development, bloody confrontations between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are inevitable before the final struggle; they may originate not only from unsuccessful insurrectional attempts on the part of the proletariat, but also from inevitable, partial and transitory clashes between the forces of bourgeois defence and groups of proletarians who have been impelled to rise in arms, or between bands of bourgeois “white guards” and workers who have been attacked and provoked by them. It is not correct either to say that communist parties must disavow all such actions and reserve all their force for the final moment, because all struggles necessitate a preparation and a period of training and it is in these preliminary actions that the revolutionary capacity of the party to lead and organise the masses must begin to be forged and tested.

It would be a mistake, however, to deduce from all these preceding considerations that the action of the political class party is merely that of a general staff which could by its mere will, determine the movement of the armed forces and their utilisation. And it would be an imaginary tactical perspective to believe that the party, after having created a military organisation, could launch an attack at a given moment when it would judge its strength to be sufficient to defeat the forces of bourgeois defence.

The offensive action of the party is conceivable only when the reality of the economic and social situation throws the masses into a movement aimed at solving the problems directly related, on the widest scale, to their conditions in life; this movement creates an unrest which can only develop in a truly revolutionary direction on the condition that the party intervenes by clearly establishing its general aims, and rationally and efficiently organising its action, including the military technique. It is

certain that the party's revolutionary preparation can begin to translate itself into planned actions even in the partial movements of the masses: thus retaliation against white terror – whose aims are to give the proletariat the feeling that it is definitively weaker than its adversaries and to make it abandon the revolutionary preparation – is an indispensable tactical means.

However it would be another voluntarist error – for which there cannot and must not be any room in the methods of the Marxist International – to believe that by utilising such military forces, even though they may be extremely well organised on a broad scale, it is possible to change the situations and to provoke the starting of the general revolutionary struggle in the midst of a stagnating situation.

One can create neither parties nor revolutions; one leads the parties and the revolutions, by unifying all the useful international revolutionary experiences in order to secure the greatest chances of victory of the proletariat in the battle which is the inevitable outcome of the historical epoch in which we live. This is what seems to us to be the necessary conclusion.

The fundamental criteria which direct the action of the masses are expressed in the organisational and tactical rules which the International must fix for all member-parties. But these criteria cannot go as far as to directly reshape the parties with the illusion of giving them all the dimensions and characteristics that would guarantee the success of the revolution. They must, instead, be inspired by Marxist dialectics and based above all on the programmatic clarity and homogeneity on one hand, and on the centralising tactical discipline on the other.

There are in our opinion two "opportunistic" deviations from the correct path. The first one consists of deducing the nature and characteristics of the party on the basis of whether or not it is possible, in a given situation, to regroup numerous forces: this amounts to having the party's organisational rules dictated by situations and to giving it, from the outside, a constitution different from that which it has attained in a particular situation. The second deviation consists of believing that a party, provided it is numerically large and has achieved a military preparation, can provoke revolutionary situations by giving an order to attack: this amounts to asserting that historical situations can be created by the will of the party.

Regardless of which deviation should be called "right wing" or left wings it is certain that both are far removed from the correct Marxist doctrine. The first deviation renounces what can and must be the legitimate intervention of the international movement with a systematic body of organisational and tactical rules; it renounces that degree of influence – which derives from a precise consciousness and historical experience – that our will can and must exercise on the development of the revolutionary process. The second deviation attributes an excessive and unreal importance to the will of the minorities, which results in the risk of leading to disastrous defeats.

Communist revolutionaries must be those who on the contrary have been collectively tempered by the experiences of the struggle against the degenerations of the proletarian movement, who firmly believe in the revolution, and who strongly desire it, but not like someone who would expect a payment and would sink into despair and discouragement if the due date was to be delayed for only one day.

Notes:

1. See “Party and Class” 2. See The Conditions of Admission to the Communist International (in English) in Programme Communiste no. 65, December 1974.

Amadeo Bordiga 1926

Draft theses for the 3rd Congress of the

Communist Party of Italy

presented by the Left

(The Lyons Theses, 1926)

Source:
http://web.infinito.it/utenti/c/communism/classici/bordigen.htm;

First Published: Part One of the **Lyon Theses**, the “General Questions”, appeared in *L'Unità* on the 12, 14, 23 & 26 January; the complete text as a pamphlet with the title “Theses for the 3rd Congress”, Rome 1926;

HTML Mark-up: Andy Blunden 2003.

Rome Theses — voted on at the 2nd congress of the Communist Party of Italy on March 26, 1922. The text presented at the congress is published in Comunista, no.67, 31/12/1921; in Ordine Nuovo, no.2, 3/1/1922; in the Lavoratore, No. 4960; in Rassegna Comunista, No.17 on the 30/1/1922. The few changes made to the first text at the congress are published in: Comunista, No.95, 4/4/1922; the Lavoratore, No.5014, 5/4/1922; in Ordine Nuovo, No.96, 6/4/1922; in Rassegna Comunista, No.26, 31/7/1922.

Theses on the Tactics of the Communist International — presented at the 4th congress of the Communist International. Published in No. 16 of the *Stato Operaio* on 6/3/1924.

Programme of Action of the Communist Party of Italy — presented at the 4th congress of the Communist International. Published in the above-mentioned issue of *Stato Operaio*.

Motions and Theses approved at the national (consultative) conference of the Communist Party of Italy in May 1924, published in*Stato Operaio*, No.16 on 18/3/1924.

Theses on the Tactics of the Communist International — presented at the 5th World Congress. Published (in French and German) in the Congress Bulletin, No.20, 8/7/1924.

I. — General questions

1. — Principles of communism

The key doctrines of the communist party are founded on Marxism, which the struggle against opportunist deviations reinstated and set in place as the cornerstones of the 3rd International. These consist of: Dialectical Materialism as the method of conceiving of the world and human history; the fundamental doctrines contained in Marx's **Capital** as method of interpretation of present-day capitalist economy; the programmatic formulations of **The Communist Manifesto** as the historical and political plan of emancipation of the world working class. The magnificent victorious experience of the Russian revolution, and the work of its leader Lenin, master of international communism, constitute the confirmation, the restoration and the consequent development of this system of principles and methods. It is not possible to be a communist or to militate in the ranks of the International if even one part of this is rejected.

Consequently, the communist party rejects and condemns the doctrines of the dominant class, which range from spiritualistic and religious theories — idealist in philosophy and reactionary in politics — to those which are positivist and of a free-thinking Voltairian variety — and anti-clerical and democratic in the realm of politics.

It likewise condemns certain political schools which have a following amongst the working-class: social-democratic reformism, which cherishes peaceful transition, without armed struggle, from capitalist to workers' power, invoking class collaboration; syndicalism, which depreciates the political activity of the working class and the need for the party as supreme revolutionary organ; anarchism, which denies the historical necessity of the State and of the proletarian dictatorship as the means whereby the social order is transformed and class divisions suppressed. The communist party likewise opposes the many manifestations of spurious revolutionism which aim to resuscitate such tendencies by mingling them with communist theses — a danger that is designated by the now well-known term "centrism".

2. — Nature of the Party

The historical course of the proletariat's emancipation and the foundation of a new social order derives from the existence of the class struggle. Every class struggle is a political struggle; that is to say, it has the tendency to end up as a struggle for the conquest of political power and control of the new State organism. **Consequently, the organ which leads the class struggle to its final victory is the class political party, which is the sole possible instrument firstly of revolutionary insurrection and then of government**. From these simple but brilliant assertions of Marx, brought into maximum relief by Lenin, arises the definition of the party as an organisation of all those who are conscious of the system of opinions in which is summed up the historical task of the revolutionary class and who have decided to work for the victory of this class. Thanks to the party, the working class acquires the knowledge of the way forward and the will to take it. **Historically, the party therefore represents the class in the successive stages of the struggle, even if only a greater or smaller part of the class is regrouped in its ranks**. This equates with how Lenin defined the party at the 2nd World Congress.

Marx and Lenin's conception of the party stands in sharp contrast to the typically opportunist conception of the labourist or workerist party to whom all those individuals who are proletarian in terms of their social condition are admitted by right.

Within such a party, even if exhibiting an apparent numerical strength, there may, and indeed in certain conditions there will, prevail the direct counter-revolutionary influence of the dominant class; a class represented by the dictatorship of the organisers and leaders who as individuals can derive just as well from the proletariat as from other classes. This is why Marx and Lenin fought against this fatal theoretical error, and never hesitated to break up false proletarian unity in practice in order to ensure, even during moments when the social activity of the proletariat was eclipsed, and even by way of small political groups of adherents of the revolutionary programme, that there would be continuity of the political function of the party in preparation for the subsequent tasks of the proletariat. This is the only possible way to achieve in the future the concentration of the greatest possible section of workers around the leadership and under the banner of a communist party capable of fighting and winning.

An **immediate** organisation of all workers on an economic basis cannot take on political — that is revolutionary — tasks since the separate and localised professional groups feel impelled to satisfy only the partial demands that arise as a direct consequence of capitalist exploitation. Only with the direct intervention at the head of the working-class of a political party, defined by the **political** adherence of its members, do we find the progressive synthesis of these particular impulses into a common vision and activity, whereby individuals and groups are enabled to go beyond all particularism and accept difficulties and sacrifices for the final and general triumph of the working-class cause. The definition of the party as class party of the working class has a final and historical value for Marx and Lenin — not a vulgarly statistical and constitutional one.

Any conception of the problems of internal organisation that leads to the error of the labourist conception of the party reveals a serious theoretical deviation, inasmuch as it substitutes a democratic vision for a revolutionary one, and attributes more importance to utopian schemes for designing new organisations than to the dialectical reality of the collision of forces between the two opposed classes. In other words, it represents the danger of relapsing into opportunism. As regards the perils of degeneration of the revolutionary movement, and of the means to guarantee the required continuity of the political line in its leaders and members, these dangers can't be eradicated with organisational formulae. Less still is it possible to eliminate them with the formula which states that only authentic workers can be communist, a position contradicted in our own experience by the vast majority of examples, relating to both individuals and parties. The aforementioned guarantee must be sought elsewhere if we don't wish to contradict the fundamental marxist postulate; "**the revolution isn't a question of forms of organisation**"; a postulate in which are summed up all the conquests achieved by scientific socialism with respect to the first rantings of utopianism.

Our resolution to the current problems regarding the internal organisation of the International and the party set out from these conceptions on the nature of the class party.

3. — Party Tactics and Party Action

The way the party operates in response to specific situations, and relates to other groups, organisations, and institutions of the society in which it moves, constitute its' tactics. The general elements of this question must be defined in relation to our overall

principles; it is then possible, on a secondary level, to establish concrete norms of action in relation to different types of practical problems and the successive phases of historical development.

By assigning to the revolutionary party its place and its role in the genesis of a new society, the marxist doctrine provides the most brilliant of resolutions to the question of freedom and determination in the activity of mankind. When extended to the abstract "individual" however, the question will continue to furnish material for the metaphysical lucubrations of the philosophers of the ruling and decadent class for years to come. Marxism on the other hand situates the problem in the correct light of a scientific and objective conception of society and history. The idea that the individual — and indeed one individual — can act on the outside world and shape it and mould it at will as though the power of initiative partook of some kind of divine inspiration is a million miles from our view. We equally condemn the voluntarist conception of the party according to which a small group of men, after having forged for themselves a profession of faith, proceed to spread and impose it by a gigantic effort of will, activity and heroism. It would, on the other hand, be a stupid and aberrant conception of marxism to believe that the course of history and revolution proceed according to fixed laws, with nothing remaining for us to do apart from discovering what these laws might be through objective research and attempting to formulate predictions about the future whilst attempting nothing in the domain of action; The upshot of this fatalist conception is to annul the function of the party and indeed its very existence. Marxist determinism doesn't attempt to find a solution halfway between these two solutions but in its powerful originality rises above them both. Because it is dialectical and historical, it rejects all apriorisms and doesn't claim to be able to apply, regardless of the historical epoch or the human groupings under consideration, one abstract solution to every problem. If the current development of the sciences does not allow for a complete investigation of what induces the individual to act, starting with physical and biological facts to arrive at a science of psychological activity, it is nevertheless possible to resolve the problem in the field of sociology by applying to the problem, like Marx, the methods of investigation appropriate to experimental and positive science fully inherited by socialism and which are quite different from the self-styled materialistic and positivist philosophy adopted during the historical advance of the bourgeois class. By taking rational account of the reciprocal influences between individuals, through the critical study of economy and history, after having cleared the decks of every prejudice contained in the traditional ideologies, we can in a certain sense remove indeterminacy from the processes operating within each individual. With this as its point of departure, marxism has been able to establish an ideological system that isn't an immutable and fixed gospel, but a living instrument that enables the laws of the historical process to be followed and recognised. By means of the economic determinism discovered by Marx, which forms the basis of this system, the study of economic forms and relationships, and the development of the technical means of production, provides us with an objective platform on which to make soundly based enunciations about the laws of social life, and, to a certain degree, make predictions about its subsequent development. With this duly recorded, we must emphasise that the final solution doesn't mean we can say that having discovered the universal key, we may let economic phenomena follow their own immanent law and a predictable and established series of political facts will inevitably take place.

Undoubtedly our critique is tantamount as completely and definitely devoiding of any meaning the aims and perspectives individuals had in historical events, even when such individuals are considered protagonists of historical deeds, although this does not completely apply to their actions. This, however, does not imply that a collective organism, such as the class party, could not, and should not, express initiatives of its own or have its own will. The solution we get to is countless times expressed in our fundamental texts.

Humanity, and its most powerful groupings such as classes, parties and States, have moved almost as if they were playthings in the grip of economic laws, up to now almost entirely unknown to them. These groupings at the same time have lacked theoretical awareness of the economic process, and the possibility of managing and controlling it. However, the class that appears in the present historical epoch, the proletariat, and the political groupings, which inevitably emanate from it -the party and the State — for them the problem, is modified. This is because the proletariat is the first class that isn't driven to base its rise to power on the consolidation of social privileges and class divisions, the first not to subject and exploit another class anew, whilst at the same time, it is the first that manages to shape a doctrine of the social and historical development of the economy — in other words: Marxist Communism.

For the first time then, a class fights for the suppression of classes in general and the suppression of private property in the means of production in general, rather than fighting for the mere transformation of the social forms of property.

The proletariat's programme, together with its emancipation from the present dominant and privileged classes, is the emancipation of the human collectivity from bondage to the laws of economy, which once understood, can be dominated within an economy which is finally rational and scientific, and which is subject to the direct intervention of Man. This is what Engels meant when he wrote that the proletarian revolution marks the passage from the world of necessity to the world of freedom.

This does not mean that we resuscitate the illusory myth of individualism, which wishes to liberate the human "ego" from external influences, especially since these influences tend to become ever more complex and the life of the individual ever more an indistinguishable part of a collective life. On the contrary, the parameters of the problem are changed, with will and freedom attributed to a class, a class destined to become the unitary human grouping itself, a grouping which one day will struggle against the adverse forces of the external physical world alone.

Whilst only proletarian humanity (still in the future for us) will be free and capable of a will isn't sentimental illusion but the capacity to organise and master the economy in the broadest sense of the word; and whilst it is true that the proletarian class today still has the extent of its activity **determined** by influences external to it (though less so than other classes), the organ in which, on the contrary, is summed up the full extent of volitional possibilities and initiative in all fields of activity is the political party. Not just any old party though, but the party of the proletarian class, the communist party, linked as though by an unbroken thread to the ultimate goals in the future. The party's power of volition, as well as its consciousness and theoretical knowledge are functions that are exquisitely collective. Marxism explains that the leaders in the party itself are given their job because they are considered as instruments and operators who best manifest the capacity to comprehend and explain facts and lead and will action, with such capacities nevertheless maintaining their origin in the existence and character of

the collective organ. By way of these considerations, the marxist conception of the party and its activity, as we have stated, thus shuns fatalism, which would have us as passive spectators of phenomena into which no direct intervention is felt possible.

Likewise, it rejects every voluntarist conception, as regards individuals, according to which the qualities of theoretical preparation, force of will, and the spirit of sacrifice — in short, a special type of moral figure and a requisite level of "purity" — set the required standards for every single party militant without exception, reducing the latter to an elite, distinct and superior to the rest of the elements that compose the working class. The fatalist and passivistic error, though it might not necessarily lead to negating the function and the utility of the party, at the very least would certainly involve adapting the party to a proletarian class that is understood merely in a statistical and economic sense. We can sum up the conclusions touched on in the preceding theses as the condemnation of both the workerist conception, and that of an elite of an intellectual and moral character. Both these tendencies are aberrations from marxism which end up converging on the slippery slope to opportunism.

In resolving the general question of tactics on the same terrain as that of the nature of party, the marxist solution must be distinguished both from that doctrinal estrangement from the reality of the class struggle which contents itself with abstract lucubrations, whilst negating concrete activity, and from sentimental aestheticism; which aspires, with the noisy gestures and heroic posturing of tiny minorities, to bring about new situations and historical movements. Also, it must be distinguished from opportunism, which neglects the link with principles, i.e. with the general scope of the movement, and, keeping in view only an immediate and apparent success, is content to clamour for isolated and limited demands without bothering about whether these contradict the necessity of preparing for the supreme conquests of the working class. The mistake of Anarchist politics derives both from a doctrinal sterility, in its incapacity to comprehend the dialectical stages of real historical evolution, and from its voluntarist illusions, which cherish the fond hope of being able to speed up social processes by the force of example, and of sacrifices made by the one or the many. The mistake of social-democratic politics derives as much from a false conception of marxism in holding that the revolution will mature slowly of its own accord, without a revolutionary insurrection willed by the proletariat, as it does from a voluntarist pragmatism, which, unable to relinquish the immediate results of its day to day initiatives and interventions, is happy to struggle for objectives which are of only superficial interest to proletarian groups. For once obtained, these objectives merely become parts of the game of conserving the dominant class rather than serving as preparation for the victory of the proletariat: such objectives are the partial reforms, concessions and advantages, both political and economic, obtained from the bosses and the bourgeois State.

The artificial introduction into the class movement of the theoretical dictates of "modern" voluntarist and pragmatist philosophy (Bergson, Gentile, Croce) based on idealism, can only but prepare the opportunist affirmation of new waves of reformism. It cannot be passed off as reaction to reformism just because it demonstrate a superficial liking for bourgeois positivism.

The party cannot and must not restrict its activity either to merely conserving the purity of theoretical principles and organisational structure, or to achieving immediate

successes and a numerical popularity regardless of the cost. At all times and in all places, it must consolidate the following three points:

a) The defence and clarification of the fundamental programmatic postulates, that is, the theoretical knowledge of the working-class movement, in relation to new events as they arise;

b) The assurance of the continuity of the organisational unity and efficiency of the party, and its defence against contamination by extraneous influences opposed to the revolutionary interests of the proletariat;

c) The active participation in all the struggles of the working class, including those that arise out of partial and limited interests, in order to encourage their development. Emphasis however must constantly be placed on the factor of their links with the final revolutionary aims, and with the conquests of the class struggle presented as stepping-stones on the way to the indispensable combat to come. This means denouncing the perils of abandoning ourselves to partial accomplishments as though they were points of arrival, and the danger of bartering these for the conditions of class activity and combativity of the proletariat which are the autonomy and independence of its ideology and its organisations, most important of which is the party.

The supreme purpose of this complex party activity is the creation of the **subjective** conditions for the proletariat's preparation, so that it is in a position to profit from revolutionary possibilities as soon as history presents them, and emerge from the struggle victor rather than vanquished.

All this is the point of departure for responding to the questions of the relations between the party and the proletarian masses, the party and other political parties, and the proletariat and other social classes. We must consider the following tactical formulation wrong: all true communist parties should **in all situations** strive to be mass parties, that is to say, always be organisations with huge memberships and a very widespread influence over the proletariat such as to at least exceed that of the other self-styled workers' parties. Such a proposal is a caricature of Lenin's practical, relevant and eminently appropriate watchword of 1921, namely: in order to conquer power, it isn't sufficient to form "genuine" communist parties and launch them into the insurrectionary offensive because what is needed are numerically powerful parties with a predominating influence over the proletariat. In other words, before the conquest of power, and in the period leading up to it, the party must have the masses with it; must first of all conquer the masses. Such a formulation only becomes rather dangerous when used in conjunction with the notion of the **majority** of the masses, since it lends itself amongst "chapter and verse" leninists, now as in the past, to the danger of a social-democratic interpretation of theory and tactics; for although expressing the perfectly correct idea that the dangerous practice of engaging in**reckless** actions with insufficient forces, or when the moment isn't ripe, must be avoided, the unspecificness about how the majority is to be measured i.e. whether in the parties, the unions or other organs, gives rise to the opposite danger of being diverted from action when it is both possible and appropriate; that is, at times when truly "leninist" resolution and initiative is required.

The formula which states that the party must have the masses with it on the eve of the struggle has now become a typically opportunist formula in the facile interpretation of today's pseudo-leninists when they assert that the party must in "all situations" be a mass party. There are objective situations when the balance of forces are unfavourable

to revolution (although perhaps closer to the revolution in time than others — marxism teaches us that historical evolution takes place at very different rates), in these situations, the wish to be the majority party of the masses and enjoy an overriding political influence at all costs, can only at such times be achieved by renouncing communist principles and methods and engaging in social-democratic and petty-bourgeois politics instead. It must be emphatically stated that in certain situations, past, present and future, the proletariat has, does, and inevitably will adopt a non-revolutionary stance — either a position of inertia, or collaboration with the enemy as the case may be — but despite everything, the proletariat everywhere and always remains the potentially revolutionary class entrusted with the revolutionary counter-attack; but this is only insofar as within it there exists the communist party and where, without ever renouncing coherent interventions when appropriate, this party avoids taking paths, which although apparently the easiest routes to instant popularity, would divert it from its task and thereby remove the essential point of support for ensuring the proletariat's recovery. On dialectical and marxist grounds such as these (and never on aesthetic and sentimental grounds) we reject the bestial expression of opportunism that maintains that a communist party is free to adopt all means and all methods. By some it is said that precisely because the party is truly communist, sound in principles and organisation, it can indulge in the most acrobatic of political manoeuvrings, but what this assertion forgets is that the party itself is both factor and product of historical development, and the even more malleable proletariat is yet more so. The proletariat will not be influenced by the contorted justifications for such "manoeuvres" offered by party leaders but by actual results, and the party must know how to anticipate these results mainly by using the experience of past mistakes. It is not just by theoretical credos and organisational sanctions that the party will be guaranteed against degeneration, but by acting correctly in the field of tactics, and by making a determined effort to block off false paths with precise and respected norms of action.

Within the tactical sphere there is another error which clearly leads back to the classical opportunist positions dismantled by Marx and Lenin. This consists in asserting that in the case of struggles between classes and political organisations which take place outside the party's specific terrain, the party must choose the side which represents the development of the situation most favourable to general historical evolution, and should more or less openly support and coalesce with it. The pretext for this is that the conditions for a complete proletarian revolution (to be set in motion by the party when the time comes) will have arrived solely when there has been a sufficient maturation and evolution of political and social forms.

For a start, the very presuppositions that lie behind such politics are at fault: the typical scheme of a social and political evolution, fixed down to the smallest detail, as allegedly providing the best preparation for the final advent of communism belongs to the opportunist brand of "marxism", and is the basis on which the various Kautskys set about defaming the Russian Revolution and the present Communist movement. It isn't even possible to establish in a general way that the most propitious conditions for communist party work to bear fruit are to be found under certain types of bourgeois regime, e.g. the most democratic. For whilst it is true that the reactionary and "right-wing" measures of bourgeois governments have often obstructed the proletariat, it is no less true, and in fact occurs far more often, that the liberal and left-wing politics of bourgeois governments have also stifled the class struggle and diverted the working-

class from taking decisive action. A more accurate evaluation, truly conforming with Marxism's breaking of the democratic, evolutionist and progressive spell, maintains that the bourgeoisie attempts, and often succeeds, in alternating its methods and parties in government according to its counter-revolutionary interests. All our experience shows us that whenever the proletariat gets enthusiastic about the vicissitudes of bourgeois politics, opportunism triumphs.

Secondly, even if it were true that certain changes of government within the present regime made the further development of proletarian action easier, there is clear evidence that this would depend on one express condition: the existence of a party which had issued timely warnings to the masses about the disappointment which would inevitably follow what had appeared to be an immediate success; indeed not just the existence of the party, but its capacity to take action, even before the struggle to which we refer, in a manner which is clearly perceived as autonomous by proletarians, who follow the party not on the basis of schemes which it might be convenient to adopt at an official level but because of the party's down-to-earth attitude. When faced with struggles unable to culminate in the definitive proletarian victory, the party doesn't turn itself into a manager of transitional demands and accomplishments which are not of direct interest to the class it represents, and neither does it barter away its specific character and autonomous activity in order to become a kind of insurance society for all the political "renewal" movements or political systems and governments under threat from an allegedly "worse government".

The requirements of this line of action are often falsified by invoking both Marx's formulation that "communists support any movement directed against existing social conditions", and the whole of Lenin's doctrine directed against "the infantile disorder of Communism". The speculations attempted on these declarations of Marx and Lenin within our movement are substantially similar to analogous speculations continually indulged in by the revisionists and centrists of the Bernstein and Nenni stamp, who in the name of Marx and Lenin have mocked revolutionary marxism.

We must make two observations; first of all, Marx's and Lenin's positions have a contingent historical value since they refer in Marx's case to a pre-bourgeois Germany, and in Lenin's case, as illustrated in Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder, to the Bolshevik experience in Tsarist Russia. We shouldn't base our resolution of tactical questions under classical conditions, i.e. the proletariat in conflict with a fully developed capitalist bourgeoisie, on these foundations alone. Secondly, the support to which Marx refers, and Lenin's "compromises" (Lenin as a great marxist dialectician and champion of real, non-formal intransigence, aimed and directed at an immutable goal, liked to "flirt" with such terms) are support and compromises with movements still forced to clear the way forward with their insurrection against past social formations, even if this does contradict their ideology and the long-term aims of their leaders.

The intervention of the Communist party therefore occurs as an intervention in the setting of a civil war, and this explains Lenin's positions on the peasant and the national question, during the Kornilov affair and in a hundred other cases. These two key observations aside, neither Lenin's criticism of infantilism, nor any marxist text on the suppleness of revolutionary politics, was ever meant to undermine the barrier deliberately erected against opportunism; defined by Engels, and later by Lenin, as "absence of principles", or obliviousness of the final goal.

Constructing Communist tactics with a formalist rather than a dialectical method is a repudiation of Marx and Lenin. It is, therefore, a major error to assert that means should correspond to the ends not by way of their historical and dialectical succession in the process of development, but depending on similarities and analogous aspects that means and ends may assume in a certain immediate sense, and which we might call ethical, psychological and aesthetic. We don't need to make in the field of tactics the mistake made in the realm of principle by anarchists and reformists; to whom it seems absurd both that suppression of classes and State power is prepared by way of the predominance of the proletarian class and its dictatorship, and that abolition of all social violence is realised by employing both offensive and defensive revolutionary violence; revolutionary towards the existing power and conservative towards the proletarian power.

And it would be just as mistaken to make the following assertions: that a revolutionary party must support every struggle without taking into account the strengths of friends and foes; that communists must inevitably champion a strike to the bitter end; and that communists must shun certain means of dissimulation, trickery, espionage etc, because they aren't particularly noble or pleasant. Marxism and Lenin's critique of the superficial pseudo-revolutionism that fouls the path of the proletariat consists of attempts to eliminate these stupid and sentimental criteria as ways of resolving the problem of tactics, and their critique is now a definitively acquired experience of the communist movement.

One tactical error that this critique allows us to avoid is the following: that since communists aim for a political split with the opportunists, we should therefore support splitting off from trade unions led by supporters of the yellow Amsterdam union. It is merely polemical trickery that has misrepresented the Italian left as basing its conclusions on notions like "it is undignified to meet the opportunist leaders in person", and so on.

The critique of "infantilism" doesn't however mean that indeterminacy, chaos and arbitrariness must govern tactics, or that "all means" are appropriate for achieving our aims. To say that harmony between the means employed, and the ultimate objective, is guaranteed by the revolutionary nature of the party, and by the contributions that eminent men or groups backed up by a brilliant tradition will bring to its decision-making is just a non-marxist playing with words, because it doesn't take into account the repercussions on the party which its actions will have in the dialectical play of cause and effect. It also ignores the fact that marxism ascribes no value whatsoever to the "intentions" that dictate the initiatives of individuals or groups; and the bloody experience of the past means we cannot avoid being "suspicious" about what lies behind these intentions, though we don't mean that in an insulting way.

In his pamphlet on the infantile disorder of communism, Lenin wrote that the tactical means must be chosen in advance in order to fulfil the final revolutionary objective and governed by a clear historical vision of the proletarian struggle and its final goal. He showed it would be absurd to reject some tactical expedient just because it seemed "nasty" or was deserving of the definition "compromise" and that it was, on the contrary, necessary to decide whether or not each tactic fitted in with achieving this final goal. The collective activity of the party and the Communist International poses and will continue to pose this formidable task. In matters of theoretical principle we can say that Marx and Lenin have bequeathed us a sound heritage, although that isn't

to say that there aren't any new tasks of theoretical research for communism to accomplish. In tactical matters, on the other hand, we can't say the same, even after the Russian revolution and the experience of the first years of the life of the new International which was deprived of Lenin all too soon. The question of tactics is much too complex to be resolved by the simplistic and sentimental answers of communist "infantiles", and it requires in-depth contributions from the whole of the International communist movement in the light of its experience, old and new. Marx and Lenin aren't being contradicted if we state that in order to resolve this question, rules of conduct must be followed which, whilst not as vital and fundamental as principles, are nevertheless binding both on party members and the leading organs of the movement, who should forecast the different ways in which situations may develop so as to plan with the greatest possible degree of accuracy how the party should act when one of these hypothetical scenarios assumes specific dimensions.

Comprehending and weighing up the situation has to be the key requirement for making tactical decisions because this allows us to signal to the movement that the time has come for an action which has already been anticipated as far as possible; it doesn't however allow arbitrary "improvisations" and "surprises" on the part of the leaders. We can't predict with absolute certainty how objective situations will turn out, but we can predict what we should do in certain hypothetical situations, that is to say, we can predict tactics in their broad outlines. To deny this possibility and necessity would be to deny both a fundamental party duty, and to reject the only assurance we can give that in all circumstances party militants and the masses will agree to take orders from the leading centre. In this sense the party is not like an army or any other State mechanism, for in these organs hierarchical authority prevails and voluntary adhesion counts for nothing. We perhaps state the obvious when we say that there will always be a way left open, incurring no penalties, for party members not to obey orders i.e., simply leaving the party. Good tactics are as follows: in a given situation, even when the leading centre doesn't have time to consult the party — still less the masses — the tactics are such that they don't lead to unexpected repercussions inside the party itself and within the proletariat, and they don't go in a sense opposed to the success of the revolutionary campaign. The art of predicting how the party will react to orders, and which orders will be well received, is the art of revolutionary tactics. These tactics can only be relied upon if they collectively utilise the experiences of the past summed up in clear rules of action and if the membership, having entrusted the fulfilment of this latter task to the leaders, is convinced that these will not betray their mandate and are genuinely and decisively, and not just apparently, engaged in the work of carrying out the movement's orders. We have no hesitation in saying that since the party itself is something perfectible but not perfect, much has to be sacrificed for clarity's sake to the persuasive capacity of the tactical norms, even if this does entail a certain schematisation: for even when tactical schemes prepared by us collapse under the weight of circumstances, the matter is never remedied by relapsing into opportunism and eclecticism but rather by renewed efforts to bring tactics back into line with the duties of the party. It isn't only the good party that makes good tactics, but good tactics that makes the good party and good tactics have to be amongst those that everybody has chosen, and everybody has understood in their main outlines.

Basically, what we are rejecting is that the difficult work of the party in collectively defining its tactical norms should be stifled by demands for unconditional obedience to

one man, one committee, or one particular party of the International, and its traditional apparatus of leadership.

The activity of the party takes on **strategic** aspects in the culminating moments of the struggle for power, at which point it assumes an essentially military character. Even in the preceding phase, the party's activity is not restricted merely to ideological, propagandist and organisational functions but consists, as we've already mentioned, of active participation in the various proletarian struggles. This being so, the system of tactical norms must therefore be constructed with the precise aim of establishing under what conditions the intervention and the activity of the party in such movements — its **agitation** in the life of proletarian struggles — harmonises with the final revolutionary objective whilst simultaneously guaranteeing useful progress in the spheres of ideological, organisational and tactical preparation.

In the next part, we will take particular problems and examine how our elaboration of the particular norms of communist activity relates to the present stage of development of the revolutionary movement.

II. — International questions

1. — The constitution of the Third International

The crisis in the 2nd International caused by the war was resolved, completely and definitively, by the constitution of the Communist International, but whilst the formation of the Comintern certainly constituted an immense historical conquest from the organisational and tactical point of view, and from the point of view of the restoration of revolutionary doctrine, it did not however completely resolve the crisis in the proletarian movement.

The Russian Revolution, the first glorious victory of the world proletariat, was a fundamental factor in the formation of the new International. However, owing to the social conditions in Russia, the Russian revolution didn't provide the general historical model for revolutions in other countries in a tactical sense. This is because in the passage from feudal autocratic power to the proletarian dictatorship, there had been no epoch of political dominion by the bourgeois class, organised in its own exclusive and stable State apparatus.

It is precisely for this reason that the historical confirmation of the conceptions of the Marxist programme in the Russian revolution has been of such enormous significance and of such great use in routing social democratic revisionism in the realm of principles. In the organisational field however, the struggle against the 2nd International — an integral part of the struggle against global capitalism — hasn't met with the same success, and a lot of errors have been committed which have resulted in the Communist parties not being as effective as objective conditions would have allowed.

We are obliged to say the same when it comes to tactical matters, since many of the problems linked to the present line up of forces: the bourgeoisie, modern parliamentary bourgeois State with a historically stable apparatus, and the proletariat, have not been resolved adequately and this continues to be the case today. The communist parties haven't always obtained all they could have done from the proletarian offensive against capitalism, and from the liquidation of the social democratic parties, i.e. the political organs of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie.

2. — World economic and political situation (1926)

The international situation today appears less favourable to the proletariat than in the immediate post-war years. From the economic point of view, we witness a partial restabilisation of capitalism. However, we understand this stabilisation only to mean only that certain parts of the economic structure have been contained, and not that a state of affairs has arisen which excludes the possibility, even in the immediate future, of new disturbances.

There is still a marked capitalist crisis and its definitive worsening is inevitable. In the political sphere, we witness a weakening of the revolutionary movement in almost every advanced country, counter-balanced, happily, by the consolidation of soviet Russia and by the struggles of the colonial peoples against the capitalist powers.

Such a situation presents a double danger however. In the first place, by pursuing the erroneous method of situationism, a certain tendency towards Menshevism arises in the way the problems of proletarian action are evaluated. Secondly, if the pressure from genuine classist actions diminishes, the conditions which Lenin saw as necessary for a correct application of tactics in the national and peasant question risk being misapplied within the overall politics of the Comintern.

The post-war proletarian offensive was followed by an employers' offensive against proletarian positions, to which the Comintern replied with the watchword of the United Front. There then arose the problem of the rise in various countries of democratic-pacifist situations, which comrade Trotsky correctly denounced as representing a danger of degeneration for our movement. We must avoid all interpretations of situations which present as a vital question for the proletariat the struggle between two parts of the bourgeoisie, the right and the left, and the too strict identification of these with socially distinct groups.

The correct interpretation is that the dominant class possesses several governmental methods that are in essence reduced to two: the reactionary fascist method, and the liberal democratic method.

Setting out from an analysis of economy, Lenin's theses have already reliably proved that the most modern strata of the bourgeoisie tend to unify not only the productive mechanism, but also their political defences into the most decisive forms.

It is therefore false to state that as a general rule the road to communism must pass through a stage of left-wing bourgeois government. If nevertheless such a case arose, the condition for proletarian victory would reside in a party tactic of marshalling against the illusions generated by the accession of such a left-wing government and continuous opposition, even during periods of reaction, to political democratic formations.

3. — The International's Method of Work

One of the Communist International's most important tasks has been dispelling the proletariat's mistrust of political action, which arose as a result of the parliamentary degeneracies of opportunism.

Marxism doesn't interpret politics as the art of using cunning techniques in parliamentary and diplomatic intrigues, to be used by all parties in pursuit of their special ends. Proletarian politics rejects the bourgeois method of politics and anticipates higher forms of relations culminating in the art of revolutionary insurrection. This rejection, which we will not present in greater theoretical detail here,

is the vital condition both for the effective linking up of the revolutionary proletariat with its communist leadership, and for ensuring effective selection of personnel for the latter.

The working methods of the International fly in the face of this revolutionary necessity. In the relations between the different organs of the communist movement a two-faced politics frequently gains the upper hand, and a subordination of theoretical rationale to fortuitous motives, and a system of treaties and pacts between persons which fails to faithfully convey the relations between the parties and the masses, has led to bitter disappointments.

Improvisation, surprises, and theatrical scene changes, are factors that are entering all too easily into the major and fundamental decisions of the International, disorientating both comrades and the proletariat alike.

For example, the majority of internal party questions are resolved in international organs and congresses by a series of unwieldy arrangements which make them acceptable to the various leadership groups but add nothing useful to the real process of party growth.

4. — Organisational Questions

The consideration that it was urgent to establish a vast concentration of revolutionary forces carried a lot of weight when the Comintern was founded because at the time it was anticipated that there would be a far more rapid development of objective conditions. Nevertheless, we can now see that it would have been preferable to establish more rigorous organisational criteria. The formation of parties and the conquest of the masses has been favoured neither by concessions to anarchist and syndicalist groups, nor by the small compromises with the centrists allowed for by the 21 conditions; neither has it been favoured by organic fusions with parties or fractions of parties as a result of political “infiltration”, nor by tolerating a dual communist organisation in some countries with sympathiser parties. The watchword, launched after the 5th congress, of organising the party on the basis of factory cells, hasn’t achieved its objective, which was to remedy the glaring defects that exist in the various sections of the International.

Once applied as a general rule, especially in the way the Italian leadership has interpreted it, this watchword lends itself to serious errors and to deviation both from the marxist postulate that revolution isn’t a question of forms of organisation, and from the Leninist thesis that an organic solution can never be valid for all times and all places.

For parties operating in bourgeois countries with a stable parliamentary regime, organisation on a factory cell basis is less suitable than territorial units. It is also a theoretical error to assert that whilst parties organised on a territorial basis are social-democratic parties, those based on cells are genuine communist parties. In practice, the cell type of organisation makes it even more difficult to carry out the party’s task of unification amongst proletarians in trade and industry groups; a task that is all the more important the more unfavourable the situation is and the more the possibilities of proletarian organisation are reduced. Various drawbacks of a practical nature are connected with the proposal to organise the party on the exclusive basis of factory cells. In tsarist Russia, the issue appeared in a different context: relations between the

owners of industry and the State were different and the obligation of posing the central question of power rendered the corporatist danger less acute.

The factory cell system does not increase workers' influence in the party since the key links in the network all consist of the non-worker and ex-worker elements which constitute the official party apparatus. Given the faulty working methods of the International, the watchword "bolshevisation", from the organisational point of view, manifests as a pedestrian and inadequate application of the Russian experience, which has in many countries already prompted a paralysis, albeit unintentional, of spontaneous initiatives and proletarian and classist energies by means of an apparatus whose selection and functions are for the most part artificial.

Keeping the organisation of the party on a territorial basis doesn't mean having to relinquish party organs in the factories: indeed there must be communist groups there, linked to the party and subject to party discipline, in order to form its trade-union framework. This method establishes a much better connection with the masses and keeps the party's main organisation less visible.

5. — Discipline and fractions

Another aspect of the call for "Bolshevisation" is that complete centralisation of discipline and the strict prohibition of fractionism are considered the secure guarantee of the party's effectiveness.

The final court of appeal for all controversial questions is the central international organ, within which at least political (if not hierarchical) hegemony, is attributed to the Russian Communist Party.

Actually this guarantee is non-existent, and the whole approach to the problem is inadequate. In fact, rather than preventing the spread of fractionism within the International, it has been encouraged to assume masked and hypocritical forms instead. From a historical point of view, the overcoming of fractions in the Russian party wasn't an expedient, nor a magical recipe, applied on statutory grounds, but was both the result and the expression of a faithful delineation of the problems of doctrine and political action.

Disciplinary sanctions are one of the elements that ensure against degeneration, but only on condition that their application remains within the limits of exceptional cases, and doesn't become the norm and virtually the ideal of the party's functioning.

The solution doesn't reside in a useless increase in hierarchical authoritarianism, whose initial investiture is lacking both because of the incompleteness of the historical experiences in Russia, impressive though they are, and because even within the Old Guard, the custodian of the Bolshevik traditions, disagreements have been resolved in ways which cannot be considered as a priori the best ones. But neither does the solution lie in the systematic application of the principles of formal democracy, which for marxism have no other function than as organisational practices which can be occasionally convenient.

The communist parties must achieve an organic centralism which, whilst including maximum possible consultation with the base, ensures a spontaneous elimination of any grouping which aims to differentiate itself. This cannot be achieved with, as Lenin put it, the formal and mechanical prescriptions of a hierarchy, but through correct revolutionary politics.

The repression of fractionism isn't a fundamental aspect of the evolution of the party, though preventing it is.

To claim that the party and the International are mysteriously ensured against a relapse, or the tendency to relapse, into opportunism is not only fruitless and absurd but extremely dangerous, because such a relapse could indeed occur either due to changing circumstances, or to the playing out of residual social-democratic traditions. We have to admit that every differentiation of opinion not reducible to cases of conscience, or personal defeatism, may develop a useful function in the resolution of our problems and protect the party, and the proletariat in general, from grave dangers.

If such dangers become accentuated then differentiation will inevitably, but usefully, take on the fractionist form, and this might lead to schisms. However this won't happen because of childish reasons, because the leaders haven't put enough energy into repressing everybody, but only given the terrible hypothesis of a failure of the party and its becoming subservient to counter-revolutionary influences.

We have an example of the wrong method in the artificial solutions applied to the plight of the German party after the opportunist crisis in 1923, when whilst these artifices failed to eliminate fractionism they at the same time hindered the spontaneous determination within the ranks of the highly advanced German proletariat of the correct classist and revolutionary response to the degeneration of the party.

The danger of bourgeois influences acting on the class party doesn't appear historically as the organisation of fractions, but rather as a shrewd penetration stoking up unitary demagoguery and operating as a dictatorship from above, and immobilising initiatives by the proletarian vanguard.

This defeatist factor cannot be identified and eliminated by posing the question of discipline in order to prevent fractionist initiatives, but rather by successfully managing to orientated the party and the proletariat against such a peril at the moment when it manifests itself not just as a doctrinal revision, but as an express proposal for an important political manoeuvre with anticlassist consequences.

One negative effect of so-called bolshevisation has been the replacing of conscious and thoroughgoing political elaboration inside the party, corresponding to significant progress towards a really compact centralism, with superficial and noisy agitation for mechanical formulas of unity for unity's sake, and discipline for discipline's sake.

This method causes damage to both the party and the proletariat in that it holds back the realisation of the "true" communist party. Once applied to several sections of the International it becomes itself a serious indication of latent opportunism. At the moment, there doesn't appear to be any international left opposition within the Comintern, but if the unfavourable factors we have mentioned worsen, the formation of such an opposition will be at the same time both a revolutionary necessity and a spontaneous reflex to the situation.

6. — Tactical Questions up to the 5th Congress

Mistaken decisions have been made in the way the tactical problems posed by the previously mentioned international situations were settled. Like analogous mistakes made in the organisational sphere, they derive from the claim that everything can be deduced from problems previously faced by the Russian Communist party.

The united front tactic shouldn't be interpreted as a political coalition with other so-called workers' parties, but as a utilisation of immediate demands in particular

situations to increase the communist party's influence over the masses without compromising its autonomous position.

The basis for the United Front must therefore be sought in the proletarian organisations which workers join because of their social position and independently of their political faith or affiliation to an organised party. The reason is two-fold: firstly, communists aren't prevented from criticising other parties, or gradually recruiting new members who used to be dependant on these other parties into the ranks of the communist party, and secondly, it ensures that the masses will understand the party when it eventually calls on them to mobilise behind its programme and under its exclusive leadership.

Experience has shown us countless times that the only way of ensuring a revolutionary application of the united front lies in rejecting political coalitions, whether permanent or temporary, along with committees which include representatives of different political parties as means of directing the struggle; also there should be no negotiations, proposals for common action and open letters to other parties from the communist party.

Practical experience has proved how fruitless these methods are, and even any initial effect has been discredited by the abuses to which they have been put.

The political united front based on the central demand of the seizure of the State becomes the "workers' government" tactic. Here we have not only an erroneous tactic, but also a blatant contradiction of the principles of communism. Once the party issues the call for the assumption of power by the proletariat through the representative organisms of the bourgeois State apparatus, or even merely refrains from explicitly condemning such an eventuality, then it has abandoned and rejected the communist programme not only vis-à-vis proletarian ideology, with all the inevitable damaging consequences, but because the party itself would be establishing and accrediting this ideological formulation. The revision to this tactic made at the 5th Congress, after the defeat in Germany, hasn't proved satisfactory and the latest developments in the realm of tactical experimentation justify calls for the abandonment of even the expression: "workers' government".

As far as the central problem of the State is concerned, the party should issue the call for the dictatorship of the proletariat and that alone. There is no other "Workers' Government".

The slogan "Workers' Government" leads to opportunism, and to opportunism alone, i.e. support for, or participation in, self-styled "pro-worker" governments of the bourgeois class.

None of this contradicts the slogan: "All Power to the Soviets" and to soviet type organisms (representative bodies elected by workers), even when opportunist parties predominate in them. The opportunist parties oppose the assumption of power by proletarian organisations since this is precisely the proletarian dictatorship (exclusion of non-workers from the elective organs and power) which the communist party alone will be able to accomplish.

Suffice to say the formula of the dictatorship of the proletariat has one synonym and one alone: "the government of the communist party".

7. — The Question of the "new tactics"

The united front and the workers' government used to be justified on the following grounds: that just having communist parties wasn't enough to achieve victory since it was necessary to conquer the masses, and in order to conquer the masses, the influence of the social-democrats had to be fought on the terrain of those demands which are understood by all workers.

Today, a second step has been taken, and a perilous question is posed: to ensure our victory, they say, we must first ensure that the bourgeoisie is governing in a tolerant and compliant way, or, that classes intermediate between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat should govern, allowing us to make preparations. This latter position, by admitting the possibility of a government originating from the middle classes, sinks to the total revision of Marx's doctrine and is equivalent to the counter revolutionary platform of reformism.

The first position aims to refer solely to the objective utility of conditions insofar as they allow propaganda, agitation and organisation to be better carried out. But as we have already pointed out with regard to particular situations, both are equally dangerous.

Everything leads us to predict that liberalism and bourgeois democracy, whether in antithesis or in synthesis with the "fascist" method, will evolve in such a way as to exclude the communist party from their juridical guarantees — for what little they're worth — since it places itself outside them by negating such guarantees in its program. Such an evolution in no way contradicts the principles of bourgeois democracy, and in any case, it has real precedents in the work of all the so-called left-wing governments, and, for example, in the programme of the Italian Aventine Parliament. Any "freedom" given to the proletariat will just mean substantially greater freedom for counter-revolutionary agents to agitate and organise within its ranks. The only freedom for the proletariat lies in its dictatorship.

We have already mentioned that even if a left-wing government created conditions that we found useful, they could only be exploited if the party had consistently held to clearly autonomous positions. It isn't a matter of attributing diabolical cleverness to the bourgeoisie, but of holding on to the certainty — without which it is possible to call oneself a communist! — that during the final struggle the conquests of the proletariat will come up against a united front of the bourgeois forces, be they personified by Hindenburg, Macdonald, Mussolini or Noske.

To habituate the proletariat to picking out voluntary or involuntary supporters from within this bourgeois front would be to introduce a factor of defeat, even if any intrinsic weakness of any part of this front will clearly be a factor of victory.

In Germany after the election of Hindenburg, an electoral alliance with social-democracy and with other "republican" parties, i.e. bourgeois parties, such as the parliamentary alliance in the Prussian Landtag, was proclaimed in order to avoid a right-wing government; in France, support was given to the Cartel des gauchesin the last municipal elections (the Clichy tactic). For the reasons given above such tactical methods must be declared unacceptable. Even the theses of the 2nd Congress of the C.I. on revolutionary parliamentarism impose on the communist party the duty of only operating on electoral terrain on the basis of rigorously independent positions.

The examples of recent tactics indicated above show a clear, though not complete, historical affinity with the traditional methods of the 2nd International: electoral blocs

and collaborationism which were also justified by laying claim to a marxist interpretation.

Such methods represent a real danger to the principles and organisation of the International. Incidentally, no international congresses have passed resolutions which authorise them, and that includes the tactical theses presented at the 5th Congress.

8. — The Union Question

On the global level, the International has successively modified its conception of the relationship between political and economic organisms. Herein lies a remarkable example of the method which, rather than having particular actions derive from principles, prefers to improvise various new theories to justify actions chosen because of their apparent ease of execution and their likelihood of producing quick results.

The International originally supported the admission of unions to the Communist International, then it formed a Red International Labour Union. It was held that, since the unions were the best point of contact with the masses, each communist party should struggle for trade-union unity and therefore not create its own unions through scissions from unions led by the yellows, nevertheless on the International level the Bureau of the Amsterdam International was to be considered and treated not as an organisation of the proletarian masses, but as a counter-revolutionary political organ of the League of Nations.

At a certain point, based on considerations which were certainly very important, but limited mainly to a project for using the left-wing of the English union movement, it was announced that the Red International Labour Union should be abandoned in order to effect an organic unity, on an international scale, with the Amsterdam Bureau.

No amount of conjecture about changing circumstances can justify such a major policy shift since the question of the relations between international political organisations and trade unions is one of principle, inasmuch as it boils down to that of the relations between party and class for the revolutionary mobilisation.

Internal statutory guarantees weren't respected either since this decision was presented to the relevant international organs as a fait accompli.

The retention of "Moscow against Amsterdam" as our watchword hasn't prevented the struggle for trade-union unity in each nation and nor will it: in fact the liquidation of separatist tendencies in the unions (Germany and Italy) was only made possible by addressing the separatists' argument that the proletariat was being prevented from freeing itself from the influence of the Amsterdam International.

On the other hand, the apparent enthusiasm with which our party in France adhered to the proposition of world trade-union unity didn't prevent it from demonstrating an absolute incapacity to deal de facto with the problem of trade-union unity at a national level in a non-scissionist way.

The utility of a united front tactic on a world basis isn't however ruled out, even with union organisations that belong to the Amsterdam International.

The left wing of the Italian party has always supported and struggled for proletarian unity in the trade-unions, and this serves to distinguish it from the profoundly syndicalist and voluntarist pseudo-lefts which were fought by Lenin. Furthermore, the Left in Italy has a thoroughly Leninist conception of the problem of the relations between trade unions and factory councils. On the basis of the Russian experience and of the relevant theses of the 2nd Congress, the Left rejects the serious

deviation from principle which consists of depriving the trade unions, based on voluntary membership, of any revolutionary importance in order to substitute the utopian and reactionary concept of a constitutional apparatus with obligatory membership which extends organically over the entire area of the system of capitalist production. In practice, this error is expressed by an overestimation of the role of the factory councils to the extent of effectively boycotting the trade union.

9. — The Agrarian Question

The agrarian question has been defined by Lenin's theses at the 2nd Congress of the International. The main aim of these theses was to restore the problem of agricultural production to its historic place in the marxist system, and show that in an epoch where the premises for the socialisation of enterprises had already matured in the industrial economy, they were still lacking in the agricultural economy.

Far from delaying the proletarian revolution (which alone will create these premises), this state of affairs renders the problems of the poor peasants insoluble within the framework of industrial economy and bourgeois power. This allows the proletariat to link up its own struggle with freeing the poor peasant from a system of exploitation by the landed proprietors and the bourgeoisie, even if freeing the peasants doesn't coincide with a general change in the rural productive economy.

Large-scale landed property, deemed as such in law, is technically speaking composed of tiny productive enterprises. When the legal superstructure that holds it together is destroyed, we witness a redivision of land amongst the peasants. In reality, this is nothing other than the freeing of these small productive enterprises already separated from a collective exploitation. This can only happen if the property relations are broken up in a revolutionary way, but the protagonist of this rupture can only be the industrial proletariat. The reason for this is that the proletariat, as distinct from the peasant, isn't merely a victim of the relations of bourgeois production but is the historical product of its maturity, condemning it to clear the path to a new, different system of production. The proletariat will therefore find precious reinforcements in the revolt of the poor peasant. The essential elements in Lenin's tactical conclusions are, firstly, that there is a fundamental distinction to be made between the proletariat's relations with the peasant class, and its relations with the reactionary middle strata of the urban economy (mainly represented by the social-democratic parties); and secondly, there is the definitive principle of the pre-eminence and hegemony of the working class as leader of the revolution.

The peasant therefore appears at the moment of the conquest of power as a revolutionary factor, but if during the revolution his ideology is modified as regards the old forms of authority and legality, it doesn't change much with regard to the relations of production which remain the traditional ones of isolated family farms in mutual competition with one another. Thus the peasant still represents a threat to the construction of the Socialist economy, and only the large-scale development of productive capacity and agricultural technology is likely to interest him.

On the tactical and organisational plane the landless agricultural proletariat (day-labourers)) must be considered, in Lenin's view, the same as the rest of the proletariat, and be incorporated into the same framework; the policy of proletarian alliance with the poor peasants — working alone on their plots of land on whatever level of sufficiency — becomes a policy of mere neutralisation with regard to the middle

peasant, who is characterised as being both a victim of certain capitalist relations and an exploiter of labour. Finally, there is the wealthy peasant who is generally an exploiter of labour and the direct enemy of the revolution.

In the field of agrarian tactics, the International must avoid those mistaken applications already discernible for instance in the policies of the French party, which is drawn to the idea of a new type of peasant revolution to be considered on the same level as the worker's revolution, or to the belief that the revolutionary movement of the workers may be determined by an insurrection in the countryside, whilst in fact the actual relationship is the other way around.

The peasant, once won over to the communist programme, and therefore accessible to political organisation, should become a member of the communist party; this is the only way to combat the rise of parties composed solely of peasants inevitably prey to counter-revolutionary influences.

The Krestintern (Peasants' International) must incorporate the peasant organisations of all countries characterised, like workers' trade-unions, by the fact of accepting as members all those who have the same immediate economic interests. Also the tactics of political negotiations, the united front, or constitution of fractions within the peasant parties — even with the intention of breaking them up — must be rejected.

This tactical norm is not at odds with the relations established between the Bolsheviks and the social-revolutionaries during the civil war period when the new representative organisations of the proletariat and the peasants already existed.

10. — The National Question

Lenin has also produced a fundamental clarification of the theory of the popular movements in colonial countries and in certain exceptionally backward countries. Even though internal economic development and the expansion of foreign capital hasn't provided a mature basis for modern class struggle in these countries, demands are being made which can only be resolved by insurrectional struggle and the defeat of world imperialism.

In the epoch of struggle for proletarian revolution in the metropolises, the complete realisation of these two conditions will allow the launching of a struggle which, nevertheless, will take on locally the aspects of a conflict not of class but of races and nationalities.

The fundamental tenets of the Leninist conception nevertheless still remain that the world struggle will be directed by organs of the revolutionary proletariat, and that the indigenous class struggle, and the independent development of local communist parties, must be encouraged, and never held back or stifled.

The extension, however, of these considerations to countries in which the capitalist regime and the bourgeois State apparatus has been established for a long time constitutes a danger, insofar as here the national question and patriotic ideology become counter-revolutionary devices, and serve only to disarm the proletariat as a class. Such deviations appear, for example, in the concessions made by Radek with regard to the German nationalists fighting against the inter-allied occupation.

The International must also call for the stamping out in Czechoslovakia of any nationalist and dualist reaction within the proletarian organisations since the two races are at the same historical level and their common economic environment is completely evolved.

To elevate the struggle of the national minorities, per se to the level of a matter of principle is therefore to distort the communist conception, since altogether different criteria are required to discern whether such struggles offer revolutionary possibilities or reactionary developments.

11. — Russian Questions

The new political economy of the Russian State, based mainly on Lenin's 1921 speech on the tax in kind and Trotsky's report to the 4th World Congress, is evidently an important matter for the Communist International. Given the condition of the Russian economy, and the fact that the bourgeoisie remains in power in the other countries, marxists couldn't have presented otherwise the prospects for the development of the world revolution, and the construction of the Socialist economy.

The serious political difficulties that the internal relations of social forces, and the problems of productive technology and foreign relations have caused the Russian State, have led to a series of divergences within the Russian Communist Party; and it is really deplorable that the international communist movement hasn't found a way of making more soundly based and authoritative pronouncements on the matter.

In the first discussion with Trotsky, his considerations on the internal life of the party and its new course were undoubtedly correct, and his observations on the development of the State's political economy were also, on the whole, clearly revolutionary and proletarian. In the second discussion he was no less justified when he remarked on the International's mistakes, and demonstrated that the best traditions of the Bolsheviks did not militate in favour of the way the Comintern was being led.

The way the party reacted to this internal debate was inadequate and contrived, due to the well-known method of relying on anti-fractionist, and even worse, anti-bonapartist intimidation based on absolutely nothing of substance. As to the latest discussion, it must above all be realised that it revolves around problems of an international nature, and just because the majority of the Russian Communist Party has pronounced on the issue, there is no reason why the International cannot discuss and pronounce on it in its turn; the question still stands even if has ceased to be asked by the defeated Opposition.

As has often happened, questions of procedure and discipline have stifled really essential questions. What is at issue here is not the defence of the rights of a minority, whose leaders at least are co-responsible for numerous errors committed on the international level, but rather questions of vital importance for the world movement.

The Russian question must be brought before the International for an in-depth study. The following features must be taken into account: today the Russian economy is composed, according to Lenin, of elements that are pre-bourgeois, bourgeois, State-capitalist and socialist. State-controlled large-scale industry is socialist insofar as it is production organised by, and in the hands of a politically proletarian State. The distribution of the products derived from this industry operates however under a capitalist form, namely, through a competitive free-market mechanism.

One cannot deny in principle that workers will not only be kept in less than brilliant economic circumstances by this system (in fact that is the case) even if they do accept it because of the revolutionary consciousness they have acquired, but that it will also evolve in the direction of an increased extraction of surplus value by means of the price paid by the worker for foodstuffs, and the prices paid by the State for its

purchases, as well as the conditions it obtains in concessions, commerce and in all its relations with foreign capitalism. It is therefore necessary to ask whether the socialist elements in the Russian economy are increasing or decreasing, a problem that also means taking into account the degree of technical efficiency and how well the State industries are organised.

The building of full socialism extended to production and distribution, to industry and agriculture, is impossible in just one country, but the progressive development of the socialist elements in the Russian economy can nevertheless be achieved by thwarting the plans of the counter-revolutionaries; supported inside Russia by the rich peasants, new bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie, and outside the country by the imperialist powers. Whether such counter-revolutionary plotting takes the form of internal or external aggression, or of a progressive sabotage and influencing of Russian social and State life such as to force a progressive involution and deproletarianisation of its main features, it is a fundamental condition for success that all parties belonging to the International collaborate with each other and are able to make their contribution.

Above all, it is a matter of assuring the Russian proletariat and the Russian Communist Party of the active support of the proletarian vanguard, especially in the imperialist countries. Not only must aggression be prevented and pressure is exerted against the bourgeois States as regards their relations with Russia, but most importantly of all, the Russian party needs to be helped by its brother parties to resolve its problems. Whilst these other parties, it is true, do not possess direct experience of governmental problems, nonetheless they can help resolve them by acting as a classist and revolutionary coefficient, with experience derived directly from the real class struggles taking place in their respective countries.

As we have shown above, the internal relationships of the International do not lend themselves to this task. Urgent changes therefore need to be made in order to redress the problems in the realm of politics and in the tactical and organisational spheres that have been exacerbated by “bolshevisation”.

III. — Italian Questions

1. — The Italian Situation (1926)

Evaluations of the Italian situation that attribute decisive value to the insufficient development of industrial capitalism are wrong.

The weak expansion of industry in a quantitative sense, along with its relatively late historical appearance, were counterbalanced by a set of other circumstances which allowed the bourgeoisie to completely entrench itself politically during the period of the Risorgimento and develop an extremely rich and complex tradition of government.

The political polarities that historically characterise conflicting parties — such as the old Left and Right division, clericalism and masonry, and democracy and fascism — cannot be automatically identified with the social differences which exist between landed proprietors and capitalists, and the big and petty bourgeoisie.

The fascist movement must be understood as the attempt to politically unify the conflicting interests of various bourgeois groups under the banner of counter-revolution. Fascism, created and directly fostered by the entire upper classes (landowners, industrialists, commercial sectors, bankers, supported by the traditional

State apparatus, the monarchy, the Church, and masonry) pursued this aim by mobilising elements within the disintegrating middle classes which, in close alliance with the bourgeoisie as a whole, it has managed to deploy against the proletariat.

What has taken place in Italy shouldn't be interpreted as the arrival in power of a new social strata, as the formation of a new State apparatus with a new programme and ideology, nor as the defeat of part of the bourgeoisie, whose interests would be better served by the adoption of liberal and parliamentary methods. The Democrats and the Liberals, the Nittis and the Giolittis, are the protagonists of a phase of counter-revolutionary struggle which is dialectically linked to the fascist phase and just as decisive in effecting the proletarian defeat. In fact it was precisely their concessionary politics, with the complicity of reformists and maximalists, which allowed the bourgeoisie to resist the pressure from the proletariat and head it off during the post-war period of demobilisation, at precisely a time when every component of the dominant class was unprepared for a frontal attack.

Directly favoured in this period by governments, the bureaucracy, the police, judiciary, army etc., Fascism has since gone on to completely replace the bourgeoisie's old political personnel. However, we shouldn't be fooled by this and neither should it serve as a reason for rehabilitating parties and groups who were removed not because they achieved better conditions for the working class, but because for the time being they had completed their anti-proletarian task.

2. — Political Positions of the Communist Left

As the above situation was taking shape, the group which formed the Communist Party set out with these criteria: a break from the illusory dualisms of the bourgeois and parliamentary political scene and an affirmation of the revolutionary antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; propaganda amongst the proletariat aimed at destroying the illusion that the middle classes were capable of producing a political general staff, of taking power and clearing the way for proletarian victories; instilling confidence in the proletariat in its own historic task through propaganda based on a series of critical, political and tactical positions which were original and autonomous, and solidly linked through successive situations.

The tradition of this political current goes back to the left wing of the Socialist party before the war. Whilst a majority capable of struggling both against the errors of the reformists and the syndicalists (the latter having personified the proletarian left until then) was formed at the congresses of Reggio Emilia (1912) and Ancona (1914), an extreme left aspiring to even more radical classist solutions also emerged within this majority. Important problems for the working class were correctly resolved during this period, namely with regard to the questions of electoral tactics, links with the trades-unions, colonial war and freemasonry.

During the World War, virtually the entire party opposed the union sacré politics, and at successive meetings and Congresses (Bologna, May 1915; Rome, February 1917; Florence, November 1917; Rome, 1918), its extreme Left-wing, now clearly differentiated, defended the following Leninist positions: the rejection of national defence and defeatism; exploitation of military defeat to pose the question of power; and unceasing struggle against the opportunist trade-union and parliamentary leaders along with the call for their expulsion from the party.

Immediately after the war, Il Soviet became the mouthpiece of the Extreme Left, and the first newspaper to support the policies of the Russian revolution and to confront anti-marxist, opportunist, syndicalist, and anarchistic misinterpretations. It correctly set out the essential problems of the proletarian dictatorship and the party's tasks, and from the very start defended the necessity of a split in the Socialist Party.

This same group supported electoral abstentionism but the 2nd Congress of the International would dismiss its conclusions. It's abstentionism however didn't derive from the anti-marxist theoretical errors of the anarcho-syndicalist type, as its' resolute polemics against the anarchist press have shown. The application of the abstentionist tactic was recommended above all for fully developed parliamentary democracies, because this political environment creates particular obstacles to the winning over of the masses to an accurate understanding of the word "dictatorship"; difficulties which, in our opinion, continue to be underestimated by the International.

In the second place, abstentionism was proposed at a time when huge struggles were setting even hugger mass movements into motion (unfortunately not the case today), and not as a tactic applicable for all times and all places.

With the 1919 elections, the bourgeois Nitti government opened up an immense safety valve to the revolutionary pressure, and diverted the proletarian offensive and the attention of the party by exploiting its tradition of unbridled electoralism. "Il Soviet's" abstentionism was then entirely correct, in that it responded to the true causes of the proletarian disaster that ensued.

At the subsequent Bologna Conference (October 1919), only the abstentionist minority posed correctly the question of a split with the reformists, but it sought in vain to come to an agreement with a section of the maximalists on this point, even after abstentionism had been renounced in order to achieve it. The attempt having failed, the abstentionist fraction remained the only section of the party which, up until the 2nd World Congress, worked on a national scale for the formation of the communist party.

This was therefore the group which represented the spontaneous adherence, setting out from its own experiences and traditions, of the left of the Italian proletariat to the policies of Lenin and Bolshevism which had lately emerged victorious with the Russian revolution.

3. — The work of the Party's Left leadership

Within the new communist party, constituted at Leghorn in January 1921, the abstentionists made every effort to forge solid links with other groupings in the party. But whilst for some of these groups it was international relations alone which necessitated the split from the opportunists, for the abstentionists (who for discipline's sake had expressly renounced their positions on elections) and indeed for many other elements besides, it was because the theses of the International and the lessons of recent political struggles were completely consistent with each other.

In its work, the interpretation of the Italian situation and the tasks of the proletariat mentioned earlier inspired the party leadership. With hindsight it is clear that the delay in the formation of the revolutionary Party (for which the other groups were responsible) made the subsequent proletarian retreat inevitable.

In order to place the proletariat in the best position during the ensuing battles, the leadership took the stance that although the greatest efforts should be made to use the traditional apparatus of the Red organisations, it was also necessary to warn the

proletariat not to count on anything from the maximalists and reformists, who would even go so far as accepting a peace treaty with fascism.

From its very inception, the party defended the principle of trade-union unity, going on to propose the central postulate of a united front which culminated in the formation of the Labour Alliance. Whatever opinions one might have about the political united front, the fact is that the situation in Italy in 1921-22 made it impossibility; in fact the party never received any invitation to attend any meetings aimed at founding an alliance of parties. The party didn't intervene at the meeting to constitute the trade-union alliance called by the railway workers because it didn't want to lend itself to manoeuvres which might have compromised the alliance itself, and which might have been blamed on the party; it had already shown beforehand though that it approved of the initiative by stating that all communist workers within the new organisation would observe discipline towards it.

Certain contacts between political groups would eventually take place; the communist party wouldn't refuse to take part but they would come to nothing, demonstrating both the impossibility of arriving at an understanding on the terrain of political action, and the defeatism of every other group. During the retreat, the leadership was able to preserve the confidence of the workers in their own class, and raise the political consciousness of the vanguard, by heading off the traditional manoeuvrings of pseudo-revolutionary groups and parties within the proletariat. Despite the efforts of the party, it was not until later, August 1922, that a generalised mobilisation took place; but proletarian defeat was inevitable and from then on fascism, openly supported in their violent campaigns by the forces of a declaredly **liberal democratic** State, became master of the country. The "March on Rome" which happened afterwards merely legitimised fascism's predomination in a formal sense.

Even now, despite reduced proletarian activity, the party's influence still predominated over the maximalists and reformists, its progress having already been demonstrated by the 1921 election results and the extensive consultations that took place within the Confederation of Labour.

4. — Relations between the Italian Left and the Communist International

The Rome Congress, held in March 1922, brought to light a theoretical divergence between the Italian Left and most of the International; a divergence expressed before, rather badly, by our delegations at the 3rd World Congress and the Enlarged Executive of February 1922, where, especially on the first occasion, errors of a "leftist" nature were committed. Fortunately the Rome Theses constituted the theoretical and political liquidation of any peril of left-wing opportunism in the Italian Party.

The only difference in practice between the party and the international was about what tactics to follow with regard to the maximalists, but the unitarian victory at the socialist Congress in October 1921 appeared to have settled this.

The Rome Theses were adopted as the party's contribution to the International's decision-making not as an immediate line of action; this was confirmed by the party directorate at the Enlarged Executive of 1922, and if no theoretical discussion took place there, this was because of a decision by the International which for discipline's sake the party complied with.

In August 1922 however, the International wouldn't interpret the Italian situation in same way as the Party directorate, but concluded that the situation in Italy was unstable in terms of a weakening of State resistance. It therefore thought that a fusion with the maximalists would strengthen the party, considering the split between the maximalists and unitarians as decisive, as opposed to the party directorate that wished to apply the lessons learnt during the vast strike manoeuvre in August.

It is from this moment that the two political lines diverge in a definitive way. At the 4th World Congress in December 1922, the old leadership opposed the majority thesis, and on returning to Italy, the delegates would pass the matter to a Commission, unanimously declining to take any responsibility for the decision, though of course retaining their own administrative functions.

Then came the arrests in February 1923 and the big offensive against the party. Finally the Enlarged Executive of June 1923 would depose the old executive and replace it with a completely different one. Several party leaders would simply resign as a logical consequence. In May 1924, a Party consultative conference still gave the Left an overwhelming majority over the Centre and the Right and thus it arrived at the 5th World Congress in 1924.

5. — The "Ordinovist" tradition of the present leadership

The "Ordine Nuovo" group was formed in Turin by a group of intellectuals, who established contacts with the proletarian masses in industry at a time when the abstentionist fraction in Turin already had a large following. The volatile ideology of this group is mainly derived from philosophical conceptions of a bourgeois and idealist nature partly inherited from Benedetto Croce. This group aligned itself with communist directives very late in the day, and would always display residual errors linked to its origins. It understood the significance of the Russian revolution too late to be able to apply it usefully to the proletarian struggle in Italy. In November 1917, comrade Gramsci published an article in Avanti! asserting that the Russian revolution had given the lie to Marx's historical materialism and the theories in "Capital", and gave an essentially idealist explanation. The extreme left current that the youth federation belonged to responded immediately to this article.

The subsequent ideological development of the "Ordinovist" group, as their publication Ordino Nuovo shows, has led to a non-marxist and non-Leninist interpretation of the workers' movement. The questions of the role of the unions and the party, armed struggle and conquest of power, and the construction of socialism are not posed correctly in their theory, and they have evolved instead the conception of a systematic organisation of the labouring classes which was "necessary" rather than "voluntary", and strictly bound up with the mechanism of capitalist industrial production.

Setting out from the internal commissions, this system was supposed to culminate simultaneously in the proletarian and Communist International, in the Soviets and in the workers' State by way of the factory councils, which were held to embody the latter even before the collapse of capitalist power.

And what is more, even during the bourgeois epoch, this system was supposed to assume the function of constructing the new economy by calling for and exercising workers' control over production.

Later on, all the non-marxist aspects of "Ordinovist" ideology — utopianism, Proudhon inspired syndicalism, and economic gradualism before the conquest of power, i.e., reformism — were apparently dropped in order to be gradually substituted with the entirely different theories of Leninism. However, the fact that this substitution took place on a superficial and fictitious level could only have been avoided if the "Ordinovists" hadn't split from and opposed the Left; a group whose traditions, rather than converging with the Bolsheviks in an entirely impulsive way, represented a serious contribution, derived not from academic and bookish dissertations on bourgeois tomes but from proletarian class experience. Certainly the "Ordinovists" hadn't been prevented from learning and improving within the strictly collaborative framework which was lacking later on. As it turned out, we greeted the announcements of the "Ordinovist" leaders with a certain tinge of irony when they announced that they were bolshevising the very people who had actually set them on the road to Bolshevik positions by serious and marxist means, rather than by chattering about mechanistic and bureaucratic procedures.

Up until shortly before the 1920 World Congress, the "Ordinovists" were opposed to a split in the old party, and they posed all trade-union questions incorrectly. The International's representative in Italy had to polemicise against them on the questions of the factory councils and the premature constitution of the Soviets.

In April 1920, the Turin Section approved the famous Ordine Nuovo theses, which were drawn up by comrade Gramsci and adopted by a committee composed of both "Ordinovists" and Abstentionists. These theses, cited in the 2nd Congress's resolution, in fact expressed, despite disagreements about elections, the common thinking of the nascent communist fraction; they weren't distinctly "Ordinovist" positions, but consisted of points already clarified and accepted by the party's left-wing long before.

The "Ordinovists" would rally around the Left's positions on the International for a while, but the thinking expressed in the Rome Theses was essentially different from theirs, even if they considered it opportune to vote for them.

The true precursor of "Ordinovism's" present adherence to the tactics and general line of the International was really comrade Tasca and his opposition to the Left at the Rome Congress.

Given, on the one hand, the "Ordinovist" group's characteristic particularism and its taste for the concrete inherited from idealistic bourgeois positions, and, on the other hand, the superficial and therefore incomplete adherences allowed for by the International's leadership, we are forced to conclude, despite all their loud protestations of orthodoxy, that the theoretical adherence (of decisive importance in terms of providing a basis for actual policies) of the Ordinovists to Leninism is about as worthless as their adherence to the Rome Theses.

6. — The political work of the present Party leadership

From 1923 until now, the work of the Party leadership, which we must bear in mind took place in difficult circumstances, has led to mistakes which are essentially similar to those pointed out apropos the international question, but which have been severely aggravated at least partly by the initial Ordinovist deviations.

Participating in the 1924 elections was a very fortunate political act, but one cannot say the same about the proposal for joint action with the socialist parties nor of the way it was labelled "proletarian unity". Just as deplorable was the excessive tolerance shown

towards some of the "Terzini's" electoral manoeuvres. But the most serious problems are posed apropos the open crisis that followed Matteotti's assassination.

The leadership's policies were based on the absurd view that the weakening of fascism would propel the middle classes into action first, and then the proletariat. This implied on the one hand a lack of faith in the capacity of the proletariat to act as a class, despite its continued alertness under the suffocating strictures of fascism, and on the other, an over-estimation of the initiative of the middle-class. In fact, even without referring to the clear marxist theoretical positions on this matter, the central lesson to draw from the Italian experience has been that the intermediary layers will passively tail along behind the strongest and may therefore back either side. Thus in 1919-1920 they backed the proletariat, then between 1921-22-23 they went behind fascism, and now, after a significant period of major upheaval in 1924-25, they are backing fascism again.

The leadership were mistaken in abandoning parliament and participating in the first meetings of the Aventine when they should have remained in Parliament, launched a political attack on the government, and immediately taken up a position opposed to the moral and constitutional prejudices of the Aventine, which would determine the outcome of the crisis in fascism's favour. This wouldn't have prevented the communists from making the decision to abandon parliament, and would have allowed them to do so whilst keeping their specific identity intact, and allowed them to leave at the only appropriate time, i.e. when the situation was ripe to call on the masses to take direct action. It was one of those crucial moments which affect how future situations will turn out; the error was therefore a fundamental one, a decisive test of the leadership's capabilities, and it led to a highly unfavourable utilisation by the working class both of the weakening of fascism and the resounding failure of the Aventine.

The Return to Parliament in November 1924 and the statement issued by Repossi were beneficial, as the wave of proletarian consensus showed, but they came too late. The leadership wavered for a long time, and only finally made a decision under pressure from the party and the Left. The preparation of the Party was made on the basis of dreary directives and a fantastically erroneous assessment of the situation's latent possibilities (report by Gramsci to the Central Committee, August 1924). The preparation of the masses, which leant towards supporting the Aventine rather than wishing for its collapse, was in any case made worse when the party proposed to the opposition parties that they set up their own Anti-parliament. This tactic in any case conflicted with the decisions of the International, which never envisaged proposals being made to parties which were clearly bourgeois; worse still, it lay totally outside the domain of communist principles and tactics, and outside the marxist conception of history. Any possible explanation that the leadership might have had for this tactic aside — an explanation which was doomed to have very limited repercussions anyway — there is no doubt that it presented the masses with an illusory Anti-State, opposed to and warring against the traditional State apparatus, whilst in the historical perspective of our programme, there is no basis for an Anti-State other than the representation of the one productive class, namely, the Soviet.

To call for an Anti-parliament, relying in the country on the support of the workers' and peasants' committees, meant entrusting the leadership of the proletariat to representatives of groups that are socially capitalist, like Amendola, Agnelli, Albertini, etc.

Besides the certainty that such a situation won't arise, a situation which could only be described as a betrayal anyway, just putting it forward in the first place as a point of view derived from a communist proposal involves a betrayal of principles and a weakening of the revolutionary preparation of the proletariat.

Other aspects of the work of the leadership also lend themselves to criticism. There has been a welter of watchwords that correspond neither to any genuine possibility of realisation, nor to any visible signs of agitation outside the party machine. The core demand for workers and peasants committees, justified in a confusing and contradictory way, has been neither understood nor abided by.

7. — The party's trade-union activity

During the March 1925 metalworkers strike another serious mistake was made. The leadership should have predicted that the proletariat's disillusionment with the Aventine would propel it into class actions and a wave of strikes. If the leadership had foreseen this, it might have been possible to push the F.I.O.M. into a national strike (just as it had managed to get it to take part in the strike initiated by the fascists) by setting up a metalworkers agitation committee based on the local organisations, which throughout the country had been highly supportive of the strike.

The stance the leadership has taken on the trade unions hasn't corresponded clearly with the watchword of trade-union unification inside the Confederation; a watchword that should still be adhered to despite the organisational decomposition of the latter. The party's directives on the unions have shown evidence of Ordinovist errors as regards action in the factories: not only has it created, or is proposing to create, a multitude of conflicting organisms in the factories, but it has frequently issued watchwords which depreciate trade-unions and the idea of their necessity as organs of proletarian struggle.

A consequence of this error was the paltry settlement with FIAT in Turin; as was the confusion surrounding the factory elections, where the criteria for choosing between classist or party lists of candidates, that is on trade-union terrain, wasn't posed correctly.

8. — Party activity in agrarian and national matters

It is quite correct to have issued the call for the formation of peasant defence associations, but this work has been conducted too exclusively from on high by a party bureau.

Despite the situation's inherent difficulties, it is necessary to declare that viewing our tasks in this area in a bureaucratic way is dangerous, indeed the same goes for every other party activity.

A correct relationship between peasant associations and workers' unions must be clearly established along the following lines: whilst agricultural wage labourers must form a federation which adheres to the Confederazione del Lavoro, a strict alliance must exist between the latter and the peasant defence associations at both the central and local levels.

All regionalist, and particularly "southernist", conceptions (and there is already some evidence of this) must be avoided when dealing with the agrarian question. This is equally true with regard to the demands for regional autonomy which have been

advanced by certain new parties; who we must fight openly as reactionaries, instead of sitting around the table with them engaging in pointless negotiations.

The tactic of seeking an alliance with the left wing of the Popular Party (Miglioli) and the peasant's party has not given favourable results.

Once again concessions have been made to politicians who are outside any classist tradition; without obtaining the expected shift in the masses this has, on the contrary, often disorientated parts of our organisation. It is equally wrong to overestimate the significance of the manoeuvres amongst the peasantry for a hypothetical political campaign against the influence of the Vatican; the problem certainly exists but it won't be resolved adequately by such means.

9. — The Leadership's organisational work

There is no doubt that the work of reorganising the party after the fascist storm has produced some excellent results. However, it has retained an overly technical character; instead of ensuring centralisation by means of clear and uniform statutory norms applicable to every comrade and local committee, the attempt was made to enforce it solely by means of interventions by the central apparatus. It would have been a major step forward to have allowed the base organisations to return to electing their own committees, especially during the periods when the circumstances most favoured it.

Regarding the increase, then the subsequent decrease, in the party's membership, not to mention the departure of elements recruited during the Matteotti crisis who are leaving with the same facility as they arrived, it goes to show how matters such as these depend on changing circumstances rather than on any hypothetical advantages that a general change of direction might have.

The effects and advantages of the month-long campaign of recruitment have been exaggerated. As for organisation at the level of the cell, evidently the leadership must put into effect the Comintern's general resolutions, a matter we have already referred to elsewhere. However, it has been done in an irregular and uneven fashion involving a host of contradictions, and only after much pressure from the rank-and-file has a certain accommodation been reached.

It would be better if the system of inter-regional secretaries was substituted with a Corp of inspectors, thereby establishing direct links which were political rather than technical between the leadership and the traditional rank-and-file organisations of the party i.e., the provincial federations. The principal duty of the inspectors should be to actively intervene when the fundamental party organisation needs to be rebuilt, and then look after and assist it until normal functioning is established.

10. — The leadership and the question of fractionism

The campaign which reached its climax during the preparation for our 3rd congress, and which was deliberately launched after the 5th World Congress, rather than aiming to propagandise and elaborate on the directives of the International throughout the party with the aim of creating a really collective and advanced consciousness, aimed instead to get comrades to renounce their adhesion to the opinions of the Left as quickly as possible and with minimum effort. No thought was given to whether this would be useful or damaging to the party with regard to its

effectiveness toward the external enemy, the only objective was that of attaining by any means this internal objective.

We have spoken elsewhere, from a historical and theoretical perspective, about the delusion of repressing fractionism from above. The 5th Congress, in the case of Italy, accepted that the Left were refraining from working as an opposition although still participating in all aspects of party work, except within the political leadership, and it therefore agreed that pressure on them from above should be stopped. This agreement was however broken by the leadership in a campaign which consisted not of ideological postulates and tactics, but of disciplinary accusations towards individual comrades who were brought before federal congresses and focused on in a one-sided way.

On the announcement of the Congress, an "Entente Committee" was spontaneously constituted with the aim of preventing individuals and groups from reacting by leaving the party, and in order to channel the action of all the Left comrades into a common and responsible line, within the strict limits of discipline, with the proviso that the rights of all comrades to be involved in party consultations was guaranteed. This action was seized on by the leadership who launched a campaign which portrayed the comrades of the Left as fractionists and scissionists, whose right to defend themselves was withdrawn and against whom votes were obtained from the federal committees by exerting pressure from above.

This campaign continued with a fractionist revision of the party apparatus and of the local cadres, through the way in which written contributions to the discussion were presented, and by the refusal to allow representatives of the Left to participate in the federal congresses. Crowning it all there was the unheard of system of automatically attributing the votes of all those absent from conference to the theses of the leadership.

Whatever the effect of such measures may be in terms of producing a simple numerical majority, in fact rather than enhancing the ideological consciousness of the party and its prestige amongst the masses they have damaged it. If the worst consequences have been avoided this is due to the moderation of the comrades of the Left; who have put up with such a hammering not because they believed it to be in the least bit justified, but solely because they are devoted to the party cause.

11. — Draft programme of party work

The premises from which, in the Left's view, the general and particular duties of the party should spring, are defined in the preceding theses. It is evident, however, that the question can only be tackled on the basis of international decisions. The Left can therefore only outline a draft programme of action as a proposal to the International about how the tasks of its Italian section might best is realised.

The party must prepare the proletariat for a revival of its classist activity and for the struggle against fascism by drawing on the harsh experiences of recent times. At the same time, we need to disenchant the proletariat of the notion that there is anything to be gained from a change in bourgeois politics, or that any help will be forthcoming from the urban middle classes. The experiences of the liberal-democratic period can be used to prevent the re-emergence of these pacifistic illusions.

The party will address no proposals for joint actions to the parties of the anti-fascist opposition, neither will it engage in politics aimed at detaching a left-wing from this opposition, and nor will it attempt to push so-called left-wing parties "further to the left".

In order to mobilise the masses around its programme, the party will subscribe to the tactic of the united front from below and will keep an attentive eye on the economic situation in order to formulate immediate demands. The party will refrain from advocating as a central political demand the accession of a government that concedes guarantees of liberty; it will not put forward “liberty for all” as an objective of class conquest, but will emphasise on the contrary that freedom for the workers will entail infringing the liberties of the exploiters and the bourgeoisie.

Faced today with the grave problem of a weakening of the class unions and of the other immediate organs of the proletariat, the party will call for the defence of the traditional red unions and for the necessity of their rebirth. In its work in the factories, it will avoid creating organs if they tend to undermine this rebuilding of the trade unions. Taking the present situation into account, the party will work towards getting the unions to operate within the framework of “union factory sections”; which representing a strong union tradition, are the appropriate bodies for leading workers’ struggles insofar as today it is precisely in the factories where opportunities for struggle exist. We will attempt to get the illegal internal commissions elected through the union factory section, with the reservation that, as soon as it is possible (it isn’t at present) the committees be elected by an assembly of the factory personnel.

As regards the question of organisation in the countryside, reference can be made to what we have said regarding the agrarian situation.

Once all the possibilities for proletarian groups to organise have been utilised to the maximum, we may resort to the watchword “workers’ and peasants’ committees” observing the following criteria:

a) The watchword of constituting workers’ and peasants’ committees must not be launched in a casual and intermittent way, but set forth in an energetic campaign when a changing situation has made the need for a new framework clear to the masses, that is: when the watchword can be identified not just as a call to organise, but as a definite call to action;

b) The nucleus of the committee s will have to be constituted by representatives from the traditional mass organisations, such as the unions and analogous organisms, despite these having been mutilated by reaction. It must not include convocations of political delegates;

c) At a later date we'll be able to call on the committees to have elections, but we will have to clarify beforehand that these are not Soviets i.e. organs of proletarian government, but expressions of a local and national alliance of all the exploited for their joint defence.

Regarding relations with fascist unions: inasmuch as today the latter don’t present themselves even in a formal sense as voluntary associations of the masses, there must be an overall rejection of the call to penetrate these unions in order to break them up. The watchword of the rebuilding the Red unions must be issued in conjunction with the denunciation of the fascist unions.

The organisational measures that should be adopted inside the party have been indicated in part. Under present conditions, it is necessary to co-ordinate such measures with requirements that we can’t go into here (clandestinity). It is nevertheless an urgent necessity that they are systematised and formulated as clear statutory norms binding on all in order to avoid confusing healthy centralism with blind obedience to

arbitrary and conflicting instructions; a method which puts genuine party unity in jeopardy.

12. — Perspectives on the Party's internal situation

The internal political and organisational problems which our party faces cannot be resolved in a definitive way within the national framework, as the solution depends on the working out of the internal situation and on the politics of the International as a whole. It would a serious and shameful mistake if the national and international leaders continue to deploy the stupid method of exerting pressure from above against the Left and the reduction of complex problems of Party politics and ideology to cases of personal conduct.

Since the Left is going to stick to its opinions, those comrades who have no intention of renouncing them should be allowed, in an atmosphere free of scheming and mutual recriminations, to carry out the loyal commitment they have given, that is; to abide by the decisions of the party organs and to renounce all oppositional work, whilst being exempted from the requirement of participating in the leadership. Evidently this proposal shows that the situation is far from perfect, but it would be dangerous to delude the party that these internal difficulties can be eliminated by simply applying mechanical measures to organisational problems, or by taking up personal positions. To spread such an illusion would be tantamount to making a severe attack on the party.

Only by abandoning this small-minded approach, appreciating the true magnitude of the problem, and placing it before the party and the international, will we truly achieve the aim of avoiding a poisoning of the party atmosphere and move on to tackle all the difficulties which the party is called on to face today.

Chapter 3: Ultra-left critique: Workers Power or Communization?

Anton Pannekoek 1936

Party and Working Class

We are only at the very earliest stages of a new workers' movement. The old movement was embodied in parties, and today belief in the party constitutes the most powerful check on the working class' capacity for action. That is why we are not trying to create a new party. This is so, not because our numbers are small -- a party of any kind begins with a few people -- but because, in our day, a party cannot be other than an organization aimed at directing and dominating the proletariat. To this type of organization we oppose the principle that the working class can effectively come into its own and prevail only by taking its destiny into its own hands. The workers are not to adopt the slogans of any group whatsoever, not even our own groups; they are to think, decide and act for themselves. Therefore, in this transitional period, the natural organs of education and enlightenment are, in our view, work groups, study and discussion circles, which have formed of their own accord and are seeking their own way.

This view directly contradicts the traditional ideas about the role of the party as an essential educational organ of the proletariat. Hence it is resisted in many quarters

where, however, there is no further desire to have dealings either with the Socialist Party or the Communist Party. This, no doubt, is to be partly explained by the strength of tradition: when one has always regarded the class war as a party war and a war between parties, it is very difficult to adopt the exclusive viewpoint of class and of the class war. But partly, too, one is faced with the clear idea that, after all, it is incumbent on the party to play a role of the first importance in the proletarian struggle for freedom. It is this idea we shall now examine more closely.

The whole question pivots, in short, on the following distinction: a party is a group based on certain ideas held in common, whereas a class is a group united on the basis of common interests. Membership in a class is determined by function in the production process, a function that creates definite interests. Membership in a party means being one of a group having identical views about the major social questions.

In recent times, it was supposed for theoretical and practical reasons that this fundamental difference would disappear within a class party, the 'workers' party.' During the period when Social Democracy was in full growth, the current impression was that this party would gradually unite all the workers, some as militants, others as sympathizers. And since the theory was that identical interests would necessarily engender identical ideas and aims, the distinction between class and party was bound, it was believed, to disappear. Social Democracy remained a minority group, and moreover became the target of attack by new workers' groups. Splits occurred within it, while its own character underwent radical change and certain articles of its program were either revised or interpreted in a totally different sense. Society does not develop in a continuous way, free from setbacks, but through conflicts and antagonisms. While the working class battle is widening in scope, the enemy's strength is increasing. Uncertainty about the way to be followed constantly and repeatedly troubles the minds of the combatants; and doubt is a factor in division, of internal quarrels and conflicts within the workers' movement.

It is useless to deplore these conflicts as creating a pernicious situation that should not exist and which is making the workers powerless. As has often been pointed out, the working class is not weak because it is divided; on the contrary, it is divided because it is weak. And the reason why the proletariat ought to seek new ways is that the enemy has strength of such a kind that the old methods are ineffectual. The working class will not secure these ways by magic, but through a great effort, deep reflection, through the clash of divergent opinions and the conflict of impassioned ideas. It is incumbent upon it to find its own way, and precisely therein is the raison d'être of the internal differences and conflicts. It is forced to renounce outmoded ideas and old chimeras, and it is indeed the difficulty of this task that engenders such big divisions.

Nor should the illusion be nursed that such impassioned party conflicts and opinion clashes belong only to a transitional period such as the present one, and that they will in due course disappear, leaving a unity stronger than ever. Certainly, in the evolution of the class struggle, it sometimes happens that all the various elements of strength are merged in order to snatch some great victory, and that revolution is the fruit of this unity. But in this case, as after every victory, divergences appear immediately when it comes to deciding on new objectives. The proletariat then finds itself faced with the most arduous tasks: to crush the enemy, and more, to organize production, to create a new order. It is out of the question that all the workers, all categories and all groups, whose interests are still far from being homogeneous, should

think and feel in the same way, and should reach spontaneous and immediate agreement about what should be done next. It is precisely because they are committed to finding for themselves their own way ahead that the liveliest differences occur, that there are clashes among them, and that finally, through such conflict, they succeed in clarifying their ideas.

No doubt, if certain people holding the same ideas get together to discuss the prospects for action, to hammer out ideas by discussion, to indulge in propaganda for these attitudes, then it is possible to describe such groups as parties. The name matters little, provided that these parties adopt a role distinct from that which existing parties seek to fulfil. Practical action, that is, concrete class struggle, is a matter for the masses themselves, acting as a whole, within their natural groups, notably the work gangs, which constitute the units of effective combat. It would be wrong to find the militants of one tendency going on strike, while those of another tendency continued to work. In that case, the militants of each tendency should present their viewpoints to the factory floor, so that the workers as a whole are able to reach a decision based on knowledge and facts. Since the war is immense and the enemy's strength enormous, victory must be attained by merging all the forces at the masses' disposal -- not only material and moral force with a view to action, unity and enthusiasm, but also the spiritual force born of mental clarity. The importance of these parties or groups resides in the fact that they help to secure this mental clarity through their mutual conflicts, their discussions, their propaganda. It is by means of these organs of self-clarification that the working class can succeed in tracing for itself the road to freedom.

That is why parties in this sense (and also their ideas) do not need firm and fixed structures. Faced with any change of situation, with new tasks, people become divided in their views, but only to reunite in new agreement; while others come up with other programs. Given their fluctuating quality, they are always ready to adapt themselves to the new.

The present workers' parties are of an absolutely different character. Besides, they have a different objective: to seize power and to exercise it for their sole benefit. Far from attempting to contribute to the emancipation of the working class, they mean to govern for themselves, and they cover this intention under the pretence of freeing the proletariat. Social Democracy, whose ascendant period goes back to the great parliamentary epoch, sees this power as government based on a parliamentary majority. For its part, the Communist Party carries its power politics to its extreme consequences: party dictatorship.

Unlike the parties described above, these parties are bound to have formations with rigid structures, whose cohesion is assured by means of statutes, disciplinary measures, admission and dismissal procedures. Designed to dominate, they fight for power by orienting the militants toward the instruments of power that they possess and by striving constantly to increase their sphere of influence. They do not see their task as that of educating the workers to think for themselves; on the contrary, they aim at drilling them, at turning them into faithful and devoted adherents of their doctrines. While the working class needs unlimited freedom of spiritual development to increase its strength and to conquer, the basis of party power is the repression of all opinions that do not conform to the party line. In 'democratic' parties, this result is secured by methods that pay lip service to freedom; in the dictatorial parties, by brutal and avowed repression.

A number of workers are already aware that domination by the Socialist Party or the Communist Party would simply be a camouflaged supremacy of the bourgeois class, and would thus perpetuate exploitation and servitude. But, according to these workers, what should take its place is a 'revolutionary party' that would really aim at creating proletarian power and communist society. There is no question here of a party in the sense we defined above, i.e., of a group whose sole objective is to educate and enlighten, but of a party in the current sense, i.e., a party fighting to secure power and to exercise it with a view to the liberation of the working class, and all this as a vanguard, as an organization of the enlightened revolutionary minority.

The very expression 'revolutionary party' is a contradiction in terms, for a party of this kind could not be revolutionary. If it were, it could only be so in the sense in which we describe revolutionary as a change of government resulting from somewhat violent pressures, e.g., the birth of the Third Reich. When we use the word 'revolution,' we clearly mean the proletarian revolution, the conquest of power by the working class.

The basic theoretical idea of the 'revolutionary party' is that the working class could not do without a group of leaders capable of defeating the bourgeoisie for them and of forming a new government, in other words, the conviction that the working class is itself incapable of creating the revolution. According to this theory, the leaders will create the communist society by means of decrees; in other words, the working class is still incapable of administering and organizing for itself its work and production.

Is there not a certain justification for this thesis, at least provisionally? Given that at the present time the working class as a mass is showing itself to be unable to create a revolution, is it not necessary that the revolutionary vanguard, the party, should make the revolution on the working class' behalf? And is not this valid so long as the masses passively submit to capitalism?

This attitude immediately raises two questions. What type of power will such a party establish through the revolution? What will occur to conquer the capitalist class? The answer is self-evident: an uprising of the masses. In effect, only mass attacks and mass strikes lead to the overthrow of the old domination. Therefore, the 'revolutionary party' will get nowhere without the intervention of the masses. Hence, one of two things must occur.

The first is that the masses persist in action. Far from abandoning the fight in order to allow the new party to govern, they organize their power in the factories and workshops and prepare for new battles, this time with a view to the final defeat of capitalism. By means of workers' councils, they form a community that is increasingly close-knit, and therefore capable of taking on the administration of society as a whole. In a word, the masses prove that they are not as incapable of creating the revolution as was supposed. From this moment, conflict inevitably arises between the masses and the new party, the latter seeking to be the only body to exercise power and convinced that the party should lead the working class, that self-activity among the masses is only a factor of disorder and anarchy. At this point, either the class movement has become strong enough to ignore the party or the party, allied with bourgeois elements, crushes the workers. In either case, the party is shown to be an obstacle to the revolution, because the party seeks to be something other than an organ of propaganda and of enlightenment, and because it adopts as its specific mission the leadership and government of the masses.

The second possibility is that the working masses conform to the doctrine of the party and turn over to it control of affairs. They follow directives from above and, persuaded (as in Germany in 1918) that the new government will establish socialism or communism, they get on with their day-to-day work. Immediately, the bourgeoisie mobilizes all its forces: its financial power, its enormous spiritual power, its economic supremacy in the factories and the large enterprises. The reigning party, too weak to withstand such an offensive, can maintain itself in power only by multiplying concessions and withdrawals as proof of its moderation. Then the idea becomes current that for the moment this is all that can be done, and that it would be foolish for the workers to attempt a violent imposition of utopian demands. In this way, the party, deprived of the mass power of a revolutionary class, is transformed into an instrument for the conservation of bourgeois power.

We have just said that, in relation to the proletarian revolution, a 'revolutionary party' is a contradiction in terms. This could also be expressed by saying that the term 'revolutionary' in the expression 'revolutionary party' necessarily designates a bourgeois revolution. On every occasion, indeed, that the masses have intervened to overthrow a government and have then handed power to a new party, it was a bourgeois revolution that took place -- a substitution of a new dominant category for an old one. So it was in Paris when, in 1830, the commercial bourgeoisie took over from the big landed proprietors; and again, in 1848, when the industrial bourgeoisie succeeded the financial bourgeoisie; and again in 1871 when the whole body of the bourgeoisie came to power. So it was during the Russian Revolution, when the party bureaucracy monopolized power in its capacity as a governmental category. But in our day, both in Western Europe and in America, the bourgeoisie is too deeply and too solidly rooted in the factories and the banks to be removed by a party bureaucracy. Now as always, the only means of conquering the bourgeoisie is to appeal to the masses, the latter taking over the factories and forming their own complex of councils. In this case, however, it seems that the real strength is in the masses who destroy the domination of capital in proportion as their own action widens and deepens.

Therefore, those who contemplate a 'revolutionary party' are learning only a part of the lessons of the past. Not unaware that the workers' parties -- the Socialist Party and Communist Party -- have become organs of domination serving to perpetuate exploitation, they merely conclude from this that it is only necessary to improve the situation. This is to ignore the fact that the failure of the different parties is traceable to a much more general cause -- namely, the basic contradiction between the emancipation of the class, as a body and by their own efforts, and the reduction of the activity of the masses to powerlessness by a new pro-workers' power. Faced with the passivity and indifference of the masses, they come to regard themselves as a revolutionary vanguard. But, if the masses remain inactive, it is because, while instinctively sensing both the colossal power of the enemy and the sheer magnitude of the task to be undertaken, they have not yet discerned the mode of combat, the way of class unity. However, when circumstances have pushed them into action, they must undertake this task by organizing themselves autonomously, by taking into their own hands the means of production, and by initiating the attack against the economic power of capital. And once again, every self-styled vanguard seeking to direct and to dominate the masses by means of a 'revolutionary party' will stand revealed as a reactionary factor by reason of this very conception.

Anton Pannekoek

Workers Councils

In its revolutionary struggles, the working class needs organization. When great masses have to act as a unit, a mechanism is needed for understanding and discussion, for the making and issuing of decisions, and for the proclaiming of actions and aims.

This does not mean, of course, that all great actions and universal strikes are carried out with soldierlike discipline, after the decisions of a central board. Such cases will occur, it is true, but more often, through their eager fighting spirit, their solidarity and passion, masses will break out in strikes to help their comrades, or to protest against some capitalist atrocity, with no general plan. Then such a strike will spread like a prairie fire all over the country.

In the first Russian revolution, the strike waves went up and down. Often the most successful were those that had not been decided in advance, while the strikes that had been proclaimed by the central committees often failed.

The strikers, once they are fighting, want mutual contact and understanding in order to unite in an organized force. Here a difficulty presents itself. Without strong organization, without joining forces and binding their will in one solid body, without uniting their action in one common deed, they cannot win against the strong organization of capitalist power. But when thousands and millions of workers are united in one body, this can only be managed by functionaries acting as representatives of the members. And we have seen that then these officials become masters of the organization, with interests different from the revolutionary interests of the workers.

How can the working class, in revolutionary fights, unite its force into a big organization without falling into the pit of officialdom? The answer is given by putting another question: if all that the workers do is to pay their fees and to obey when their leaders order them out and order them in, are they themselves then really fighting their fight for freedom?

Fighting for freedom is not letting your leaders think for you and decide, and following obediently behind them, or from time to time scolding them. Fighting for freedom is partaking to the full of one's capacity, thinking and deciding for oneself, taking all the responsibilities as a self-relying individual amidst equal comrades. It is true that to think for oneself, to think out what is true and right, with a head dulled by fatigue, is the hardest, the most difficult task; it is much harder than to pay and to obey. But it is the only way to freedom. To be liberated by others, whose leadership is the essential part of the liberation, means the getting of new masters instead of the old ones.

Freedom, the goal of the workers, means that they shall be able, man for man, to manage the world, to use and deal with the treasures of the earth, so as to make it a happy home for all. How can they ensure this if they are not able to conquer and defend this themselves?

The proletarian revolution is not simply the vanquishing of capitalist power. It is the rise of the whole working people out of dependence and ignorance into independence and clear consciousness of how to make their life.

True organization, as the workers need it in the revolution, implies that everyone takes part in it, body and soul and brains; that everyone takes part in leadership as well as in action, and has to think out, to decide and to perform to the full of his capacities. Such an organization is a body of self-determining people. There is no place for professional leaders. Certainly there is obeying; everybody has to follow the decisions which he himself has taken part in making. But the full power always rests with the workers themselves.

Can such a form of organization be realized? What must be its structure? It is not necessary to construct it or think it out. History has already produced it. It sprang into life out of the practice of the class struggle. Its prototype, its first trace, is found in the strike committees. In a big strike, all the workers cannot assemble in one meeting. They choose delegates to act as a committee. Such a committee is only the executive organ of the strikers; it is continually in touch with them and has to carry out the decisions of the strikers. Each delegate at every moment can be replaced by others; such a committee never becomes an independent power. In such a way, common action as one body can be secured, and yet the workers have all decisions in their own hands. Usually in strikes, the uppermost lead is taken out of the hands of these committees by the trade unions and their leaders.

In the Russian revolution when strikes broke out irregularly in the factories, the strikers chose delegates which, for the whole town or for an industry or railway over the whole state or province, assembled to bring unity into the fight. They had at once to discuss political matters and to assume political functions because the strikes were directed against Czarism. They were called soviets; councils. In these soviets all the details of the situation, all the workers' interests, all political events were discussed. The delegates went to and fro continually between the assembly and their factories. In the factories and shops the workers, in general meetings, discussed the same matters, took their decisions and often sent new delegates. Able socialists were appointed as secretaries, to give advice based on their wider knowledge. Often these soviets had to act as political powers, as a kind of primitive government when the Czarist power was paralyzed, when officials and officers did not know what to do and left the field to them. Thus these soviets became the permanent center of the revolution; they were constituted by delegates of all the factories, striking or working. They could not think of becoming an independent power. The members were often changed and sometimes the whole soviet was arrested and had to be replaced by new delegates. Moreover they knew that all their force was rooted in the workers will to strike or not to strike; often their calls were not followed when they did not concur with the workers' instinctive feelings of power or weakness, of passion or prudence. So the soviet system proved to be the appropriate form of organization for a revolutionary working class. In 1917 it was at once adopted in Russia, and everywhere workers, and soldiers' soviets came into being and were the driving force of the revolution.

The complementary proof was given in Germany. In 1918, after the breakdown of the military power, workers' and soldiers' councils in imitation of Russia were founded. But the German workers, educated in party and union discipline, full of social-democratic ideas of republic and reform as the next political aims, chose their party and

union-officials as delegates into these councils. When fighting and acting themselves, they acted and fought in the right way, but from lack of self-confidence they chose leaders filled with capitalist ideas, and these always spoilt matters. It is natural that a "council congress" then resolved to abdicate for a new parliament, to be chosen as soon as possible.

Here it became evident that the council system is the appropriate form of organization only for a revolutionary working class. If the workers do not intend to go on with the revolution, they have no use for soviets. If the workers are not far enough advanced yet to see the way of revolution, if they are satisfied with the leaders doing all the work of speechifying and mediating and bargaining for reforms within capitalism, then parliaments and party and union-congresses, – called workers parliaments because they work after the same principle – are all they need. If, however, they fight with all their energy for revolution, if with intense eagerness and passion they take part in every event, if they think over and decide for themselves all details of fighting because they have to do the fighting, then workers' councils are the organization they need.

This implies that workers' councils cannot be formed by revolutionary groups. Such groups can only propagate the idea by explaining to their fellow workers the necessity of council-organization, when the working class as a self-determining power fights for freedom. Councils are the form of organization only for fighting masses, for the working class as a whole, not for revolutionary groups.

They originate and grow up along with the first action of a revolutionary character. With the development of revolution, their importance and their functions increase. At first they may appear as simple strike committees, in opposition to the labor leaders when the strikes go beyond the intentions of the leaders, and rebel against the unions and their leaders.

In a universal strike the functions of these committees are enlarged. Now delegates of all the factories and plants have to discuss and to decide about all the conditions of the fight; they will try to regulate into consciously devised actions all the fighting power of the workers; they must see how they will react upon the governments' measures, the doings of soldiers or capitalist gangs. By means of this very strike action, the actual decisions are made by the workers themselves. In the councils, the opinions, the will, the readiness, the hesitation, or the eagerness, the energy and the obstacles of all these masses concentrate and combine into a common line of action. They are the symbols, the exponents of the workers' power; but at the same time they are only the spokesmen who can be replaced at any moment. At one time they are outlaws to the capitalist world, and at the next, they have to deal as equal parties with the high functionaries of government.

When the revolution develops to such power that the State power is seriously affected, then the workers' councils have to assume political functions. In a political revolution, this is their first and chief function. They are the central bodies of the workers' power; they have to take all measures to weaken and defeat the adversary. Like a power at war, they have to stand guard over the whole country, controlling the efforts of the capitalist class to collect and restore their forces and to subdue the workers. They have to look after a number of public affairs which otherwise were state affairs : public health, public security, and the uninterrupted course of social life. They have to take care of the production itself; the most important and difficult task and concern of the working class in revolution.

A social revolution in history never began as a simple change of political rulers who then, after having acquired political power, carried out the necessary social changes by means of new laws. Already, before and during the fight, the rising class built up its new social organs as new sprouting branches within the dead husk of the former organism. In the French revolution, the new capitalist class, the citizens, the business men, the artisans, built up in each town and village their communal boards, their new courts of justice, illegal at the time, usurping simply the functions of the powerless functionaries of royalty. While their delegates in Paris discussed and made the new constitution, the actual constitution was made all over the country by the citizens holding their political meetings, building up their political organs afterwards legalized by law.

In the same way during the proletarian revolution, the new rising class creates its new forms of organization which step by step in the process of revolution supersede the old State organization. The workers' councils, as the new form of political organization, take the place of parliamentarism, the political form of capitalist rule.

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Parliamentary democracy is considered by capitalist theorists as well as by social-democrats as the perfect democracy, conform to justice and equality. In reality, it is only a disguise for capitalist domination, and contrary to justice and equality. It is the council system that is the true workers' democracy.

Parliamentary democracy is foul democracy. The people are allowed to vote once in four or five years and to choose their delegates; woe to them if they do not choose the right man. Only at the polls the voters can exert their power; thereafter they are powerless. The chosen delegates are now the rulers of the people; they make laws and constitute governments, and the people have to obey. Usually, by the election mechanism, only the big capitalist parties with their powerful apparatus, with their papers, their noisy advertising, have a chance to win. Real trustees of discontented groups seldom have a chance to win some few seats.

In the soviet system, each delegate can be repealed at any moment. Not only do the workers continually remain in touch with the delegate, discussing and deciding for themselves, but the delegate is only a temporary messenger to the council assemblies. Capitalist politicians denounce this "characterless" role of the delegate, in that he may have to speak against his personal opinion. They forget that just because there are no fixed delegates, only those will be sent whose opinions conform to those of the workers.

The principle of parliamentary representation is that the delegate in parliament shall act and vote according to his own conscience and conviction. If on some question he should ask the opinion of his voters, it is only due to his own prudence. Not the people, but he on his own responsibility has to decide. The principle of the soviet system is just the reverse; the delegates only express the opinions of the workers.

In the elections for parliament, the citizens are grouped according to voting districts and counties; that is to say according to their dwelling place. Persons of different trades or classes, having nothing in common, accidentally living near one another, are combined into an artificial group which has to be represented by one delegate.

In the councils, the workers are represented in their natural groups, according to factories, shops and plants. The workers of one factory or one big plant form a unit of production; they belong together by their collective work. In revolutionary epochs, they are in immediate contact to interchange opinions; they live under the same conditions and have the same interests. They must act together; the factory is the unit which as a unit has to strike or to work, and its workers must decide what they collectively have to do. So the organization and delegation of workers in factories and workshops is the necessary form.

It is at the same time the principle of representation of the communist order growing up in the revolution. Production is the basis of society, or, more rightly, it is the contents, the essence of society; hence the order of production is at the same time the order of society. Factories are the working units, the cells of which the organism of society consists. The main task of the political organs, which mean nothing else but the organs managing the totality of society, concerns the productive work of society. Hence it goes without saying that the working people, in their councils, discuss these matters and choose their delegates, collected in their production units.

We should not believe, though, that parliamentarism, as the political form of capitalism, was not founded on production. Always the political organization is adapted to the character of production as the basis of society. Representation, according to dwelling place, belongs to the system of petty capitalist production, where each man is supposed to be the possessor of his own small business. Then there is a mutual connection between all these businessmen at one place, dealing with one another, living as neighbors, knowing one another and therefore sending one common delegate to parliament. This was the basis of parliamentarism. We have seen that later on this parliamentary delegation system proved to be the right system for representing the growing and changing class interests within capitalism.

At the same time it is clear now why the delegates in parliament had to take political power in their hands. Their political task was only a small part of the task of society. The most important part, the productive work, was the personal task of all the separate producers, the citizens as business men; it required nearly all their energy and care. When every individual took care of his own small lot, then society as their totality went right. The general regulations by law, necessary conditions, doubtlessly, but of minor extent, could be left to the care of a special group or trade, the politicians. With communist production the reverse is true. Here the all important thing, the collective productive work, is the task of society as a whole; it concerns all the workers collectively. Their personal work does not claim their whole energy and care; their mind is turned to the collective task of society. The general regulation of this collective work cannot be left to a special group of persons; it is the vital interest of the whole working people.

There is another difference between parliamentarism and the soviet system. In parliamentary democracy, one vote is given to every adult man and sometimes woman on the strength of their supreme, inborn right of belonging to mankind, as is so beautifully expressed in celebration speeches. In the soviets, on the other hand, only the workers are represented. Can the council system then be said to be truly democratic if it excludes the other classes of society?

The council system embodies the dictatorship of the proletariat. Marx and Engels, more than half a century ago, explained that the social revolution was to lead to the dictatorship of the working class as the next political form and that this was essential in

order to bring about the necessary changes in society. Socialists, thinking in terms of parliamentary representation only, tried to excuse or to criticize the violation of democracy and the injustice of arbitrarily excluding persons from the polls because they belong to certain classes. Now we see how the development of the proletarian class struggle in a natural way produces the organs of this dictatorship, the soviets.

It is certainly no violation of justice that the councils, as the fighting centers of a revolutionary working class, do not include representatives of the opposing class. And thereafter the matter is not different. In a rising communist society there is no place for capitalists; they have to disappear and they will disappear. Whoever takes part in the collective work is a member of the collectivity and takes part in the decisions. Persons, however, who stand outside the process of collective production, are, by the structure of the council system, automatically excluded from influence upon it. Whatever remains of the former exploiters and robbers has no vote in the regulation of a production in which they take no part.

There are other classes in society that do not directly belong to the two chief opposite classes: small farmers, independent artisans, intellectuals. In the revolutionary fight they may waver to and fro, but on the whole they are not very important, because they have less fighting power. Mostly their forms of organization and their aims are different. To make friends with them or to neutralize them, if this is possible without impeding the proper aims or to fight them resolutely if necessary, to decide upon the way of dealing with them with equity and firmness, will be the concern, often a matter of difficult tactics, of the fighting working class. In the production-system, insofar as their work is useful and necessary, they will find their place and they will exert their influence after the principle that whoever does the work has a chief vote in regulating the work.

More than half a century ago, Engels said that through the proletarian revolution the State would disappear; instead of the ruling over men would come the managing of affairs. This was said at a time when there could not be any clear idea about how the working class would come into power. Now we see the truth of this statement confirmed. In the process of revolution, the old State Power will be destroyed, and the organs that take its place, the workers' councils, for the time being, will certainly have important political functions still to repress the remnants of capitalist power. Their political function of governing, however, will be gradually turned into nothing but the economic function of managing the collective process of production of goods for the needs of society.

Communisation (English version)

Gilles Dauvé et Karl Nesic

Who would be the communisers ?...
Revolution of daily life...
Distant futures & "here and now"...
"Commons" ?...
Community...
No money ?...
The after-dinner critic....
Scarcity v. Abundance... Equality... Universality...
No escape from the contradiction.....

What is meant and what do *we* mean by "communisation" ? Actually, we have often dealt with this theme, for instance in our answers to the German group Revolution Times' questionnaire, published in English as *What's It All About ?* (2007), and in other texts, including *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Autonomy* (2008).

If we speak of *communisation* and not just *communism*, it is not to invent a new concept which would provide us with the ultimate solution to the revolutionary riddle. Communisation denotes no less than the content and process of a future revolution. For example, only communisation gives meaning to our critique of democracy.

In recent years, communisation has become one of the radical in-words, even outside what is known as the "communisers" (*communisateurs* in French).

As far as we are concerned, we do not regard ourselves any more members of this communising current than we feel close to - or far from - a number of other communist groups.

The communisation issue is further complicated by the emergence of the *commons* theory, according to which deep social change could come from collective usage and extension of what is already treated as common resources and activities (for instance, the open field system in still existing traditional societies, and free software access in the most modern ones). In other words, these "creative commons" would allow us a gradual and peaceful passage toward a human community.

The successive refutation of theories we regard as incomplete or wrong would have obscured our central points. As we wish to keep away from any war of the words, the following essay will try and address the communisation issue as*directly* as possible.

A few words about the word

In English, the word has been used for a long while, to convey something very different from what we are dealing with here. *To communise* was often a synonym for *to sovietize*, i.e. to implement the full program of the communist party in the Leninist (and later Stalinist) sense: "The fundamental task of Comintern was to seek opportunities to communise Europe and North America." (R. Service, *Trotsky. A Biography*, Macmillan, 2009, p. 282) This was the *Webster's*dictionary definition in 1961 and 1993, and roughly the one given by Wikipedia in 2010. This is of course not what we are talking about.

More rarely, *communisation* has been used as a synonym for radical *collectivisation*, with special reference to Spain in 1936-39, when factories, farms, rural and urban areas were run by worker or peasant collectives. Although this is related to what we mean by communising, most of these experiences invented local currencies or

took labour-time as a means of barter. These collectives functioned as worker-managed enterprises, for the benefit of the people, yet enterprises all the same.

We are dealing with something else.

It is not sure who first used the word with the meaning this essay is interested in. To the best of our knowledge, it was Dominique Blanc : orally in the years 1972-74, and in writing in *Un Monde sans argent* (A World Without Money), published in 3 booklets in 1975-76 by the OJTR (the same group also published D. Blanc's *Militancy, the Highest Stage of Alienation*). Whoever coined the word, the idea was being circulated at the time in the small milieu round the bookshop La Vieille Taupe ("The Old Mole", 1965-72). Since the May 68 events, the bookseller, Pierre Guillaume, ex-Socialisme ou Barbarie and ex-Pouvoir Ouvrier member, but also for a while close to G. Debord (who himself was a member of S. ou B. in 1960-61), had been consistently putting forward the idea of revolution as a communising process, maybe without using the phrase. Yet D. Blanc was the first to publicly emphasize its importance. *Un Monde sans argent* said the difference between communist revolution and all variants of reformism was not that revolution implied insurrection, but that this insurrection would have to start communising society... or it would have no communist content. In that respect, *Un Monde sans argent* remains a pivotal essay.

In a nutshell

The idea is fairly simple, but simplicity is often one of the most difficult goals to achieve. It means that a revolution is only communist if it changes all social relationships into communist relationships, and this can only be done if the process starts in the very early days of the revolutionary upheaval. Money, wage-labour, the enterprise as a separate unit and a value-accumulating pole, work-time as cut off from the rest of our life, production for value, private property, State agencies as mediators of social life and conflicts, the separation between learning and doing, the quest for maximum and fastest circulation of everything, all of these have to be done away with, and not just be run by collectives or turned over to public ownership: they have to be replaced by communal, moneyless, profitless, Stateless, forms of life. The process will take time to be completed, but it will start at the beginning of the revolution, which will not create the *pre*conditions of communism: it will create communism.

"Those who developed the theory of communisation rejected this posing of revolution in terms of *forms* of organisation, and instead aimed to grasp the revolution in terms of its *content*. Communisation implied a rejection of the view of revolution as an event where workers take power followed by a period of transition: instead it was to be seen as a movement characterised by immediate communist measures (such as the free distribution of goods) both for their own merit, and as a way of destroying the material basis of the counter-revolution. If, after a revolution, the bourgeoisie is expropriated but workers remain workers, producing in separate enterprises, dependent on their relation to that workplace for their subsistence, and exchanging with other enterprises, then whether that exchange is self-organised by the workers or given central direction by a "workers' state" means very little: the capitalist content remains, and sooner or later the distinct role or function of the capitalist will reassert itself. By contrast, the revolution as a communising movement would destroy - by ceasing to

constitute and reproduce them - all capitalist categories: exchange, money, commodities, the existence of separate enterprises, the State and - most fundamentally - wage labour and the working class itself." (*Endnotes*, # 2, 2010)

Is it a programme ?

We are not talking about a plan to be fulfilled one day, a project adequate to the needs of the proletarians (and ultimately of humankind), but one that would be exterior to them, like blueprints on the architect's drawing-board before the house is built. Communisation depends on what the proletarian *is* and *does*.

The major difference between Marx and utopian socialists is to be found in Marx's main concern : the labour-capital exploitation relation. Because the proletarian is the heart and body of capital, he or she carries communist potentials within himself or herself. When capital stops buying labour power, labour is nothing. So every deep social crisis opens the possibility for the proletarians to try and invent "something else". Most of the time, nearly all the time in fact, their reaction is far from communism, but the possibility of a breakthrough does exist, as has been proved by a succession of endeavours throughout modern times, from the English Luddites in 1811 to the Greek insurgents in 2008.

This is why it would be pointless to imagine an utterly different society if we fail to understand the present society and how we could move from one to the other. We must consider **what** communism is, **how** it could come about, and**who** would be in the best position to implement the historical change.

"The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the collapse of capitalism."

The SI once suggested we ought to "go back to a disillusioned study of the classical worker movement" (# 7, 1962). Indeed. To face up to our past, we must break with the legend of a proletariat invariably ready for revolution... and unfortunately sidetracked or betrayed. However, blowing myths does not mean bending the stick the other way, as if the workers had up to now persistently fought only for reforms, had glorified work, believed in industrial progress even more than the bourgeois, and dreamt of some impossible worker-run capitalism. This historical reconstruction replaces one myth by its equally misleading symmetrical opposite. The past two hundred years of proletarian experience cannot be divided into two totally opposed periods, i.e. a first one, closed by the end of the 20th century, during which the proletariat would only have been able to fight for a social programme which could be qualified as "capitalist", and a second phase (now), when the evolution of capitalism itself would render null and void the "labour capitalist" option, and the only alternative facing the proletariat would become a simple one: communist revolution or descent into barbarism.

The historical evidence offered for this watershed theory is unsubstantial.

Moreover, and more decisively, the mistake lies in the question.

No communist revolution has taken place yet. That obvious fact neither proves... nor disproves that such a revolution has been up to now impossible.

In his analysis of *The Class Struggles in France* (1850), Marx first lays down what he believes to be a general historical principle :

"As soon as it has risen up, a class in which the revolutionary interests of society are concentrated finds the content and the material for its revolutionary activity directly in its own situation: foes to be laid low, measures dictated by the needs of the struggle to be taken; the consequences of its own deeds drive it on. It makes no theoretical inquiries into its own task."

Then Marx wonders why, in the democratic revolution of February 1848, "The French working class had not attained this level; it was still incapable of accomplishing its own revolution.

The development of the industrial proletariat is, in general, conditioned by the development of the industrial bourgeoisie. (..) [But in 1848] the industrial bourgeoisie did not rule France. (..) The struggle against capital in its developed, modern form - in its decisive aspect, the struggle of the industrial wage worker against the industrial bourgeois - is in France a partial phenomenon (..) Nothing is more understandable, then, than that the Paris proletariat sought to secure the advancement of its own interests side by side with those of the bourgeoisie (..) "

Quotation is no proof, and maybe Marx was wrong, but at least let us get his view right. While he regarded full-grown industrial capitalism as a necessary condition for a proletarian revolution, he did not think that the proletarians could and would only fight for reforms for a certain period, until some complete maturity or completeness of capitalism left open one and only option: revolution.

Slicing up history into phases is very useful, except when it becomes a quest for the "last" phase.

In the past, "final" or "mortal crisis" theoreticians set out to demonstrate (usually with the help of the reproduction schema of *Capital*'s volume II) that a phase was bound to come when capitalism would be structurally unable to reproduce itself. All they actually showed was real fundamental contradictions but, as Marx wrote, contradiction does not mean impossibility. Now the demonstration moves away from schema and figures, and sees the impossible reproduction in the capital-labour relation itself. In short, up to now, communist revolution (or a real attempt to make it) has been out of the question, because the domination of capital over society was not complete enough: there was some scope for the worker movement to develop socialist and Stalinist parties, unions, reformist policies; so the working class *had to* be reformist, and the most it could do was to go for a worker-managed capitalism. Now this would be over: capital's completely real domination destroys the possibility of anything but a communist endeavour.

We ought to be a bit wary of the lure of catastrophe theory. When 1914 broke out, and even more so after 1917, communists said that mankind was entering the epoch of wars and revolutions. Since then, we have seen a lot more wars than revolutions, and no communist revolution. And we are well aware of the traps of the "decadence" theory. Only a successful communist revolution one day will allow its participants to say: "We've seen capitalism's last days". Until then, the only historical obstacle to the reproduction of the present social system will come from the proletarians themselves. There is no era when revolution is structurally impossible, nor another when revolution becomes structurally possible/necessary. All variations of the "ultimate crisis" disregard history: they look for a one-way street that could block the avenues branching off to non-communist roads. Yet history is made of crossroads, revolution being one possibility among non-revolutionary options. The schematisation of history loses its relevance

when it heralds the endpoint of evolution - in this case, capitalist evolution - and claims to be the theory to end all theories.

In 1934, as a conclusion to his essay on *The theory of the collapse of capitalism*, and after an in-depth study of the inevitability of major crises, Anton Pannekoek wrote :

"The workers' movement has not to expect a final catastrophe, but many catastrophes, political - like wars, and economic - like the crises which repeatedly break out, sometimes regularly, sometimes irregularly, but which on the whole, with the growing size of capitalism, become more and more devastating. (..) And should the present crisis abate, new crises and new struggles will arise. In these struggles the working class will develop its strength to struggle, will discover its aims, will train itself, will make itself independent and learn to take into its hands its own destiny, viz., social production itself. In this process the destruction of capitalism is achieved. The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the collapse of capitalism."

The concept of communisation is important enough as it is, without using it to fuel another variant of the "last phase of capitalism" theory. Our problem is not to prove that we have entered an entirely new epoch when the proletariat can *only* fight for communism. It is to try and define the concrete process of a communist revolution.

A novelty ?

The communist movement predates the modern proletariat that appeared in England at the end of the 18th century. It was active in the days of Spartacus, Thomas Münzer and Gerrard Winstanley. Fifty years before Marx, Gracchus Babeuf's plans had little connection with the growth of industry.

Because of his separation from the means of production (which was not the case of the serf or the tenant-farmer, however poor they were), the proletarian is separated from the means of existence. Such radical dispossession is the condition of his being put to profitable work by capital. But it also entails that, from the early days, the proletariat is capable of a revolution that would do away with property, classes and work as an activity separate from the rest of life.

The theme of communisation is as old as the proletarians' struggles when they tried to free themselves. Whenever they were on the social offensive, they implicitly and sometimes explicitly aimed at a human community which involved a lot more than better work conditions, or merely replacing the exploitation of man by the exploitation of nature. The logic or intention of the 1871 Paris *communards*, the 1936 Spanish insurgents or the 1969 Turin rebel workers was not to "develop the productive forces", nor to manage the *same* factories without the boss. It is their failure that pushed aside community and solidarity goals, discarded any plan of man-nature reunion, and brought back to the fore what was compatible with the needs and possibilities of capitalism. True, so far, past struggles have tried to launch few communist changes in the real sense of the word, i.e. changes that broke with the core capitalist structure. But this limitation was as imposed from outside as self-imposed : the proletarians rarely went beyond the insurrectionary phase, as most uprisings were quickly crushed or stifled. When the insurgents carried the day, they did attempt to live and create something very different from a worker-led capitalism. The limits of those attempts (in Spain, 1936-39, particularly) were not just the result of a lack of *social* programme, but at least as much

due to the fact of leaving *political* power in the hands of the State and anti-revolutionary forces.

What Rosa Luxemburg called in 1903 the "progress and stagnation of Marxism" can help us understand why a deeply entrenched "communising" prospect has waited so long before becoming explicit. At the dawn of capitalism, the 1830s and 1840s were a time of farseeing communist insights. Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* probably expressed the sharpest edge of social critique, so sharp that the author himself did not think it necessary to circulate it (the text was only published in 1932). Then, as the worker movement developed against a triumphant bourgeoisie, the communist intuition turned into demonstration and lost much of its visionary force: the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*'s concrete measures were compatible with radical bourgeois democracy, communism is only hinted at in *Capital*'s volume I (1967), and it hardly appears in the *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875). Marx's concern with the "real movement" led him into a search for the "laws of history", and his critique of political economy came close to a critical political economy. (He never lost sight of communism, though, as is clear from his interest in the Russian *mir*: "If revolution comes at the opportune moment, if it concentrates all its forces so as to allow the rural commune full scope, the latter will soon develop as an element of regeneration in Russian society and an element of superiority over the countries enslaved by the capitalist system." (1881))

However, as soon as the proletariat resumed its assault on bourgeois society, revolutionary theory retrieved its radical momentum: the 1871 Commune showed that State power is not an adequate revolutionary instrument.

Then again, the Paris Commune "lesson" was forgotten until, several decades later, the birth of soviets and councils revived what Marx had written in 1871.

In 1975-76, *A World Without Money* did not evade the issue of how Marx stood regarding communisation (a word and concept he never used):

"That Marx and Engels did not talk more about communist society was due, without doubt paradoxically, to the fact that this society, being less near than it is today, was more difficult to envisage, but also to the fact that it was more present in the minds of the revolutionaries of their day. When they spoke of the abolition of the wages system in the*Communist Manifesto* they were understood by those they were echoing. Today it is more difficult to envisage a world freed from the state and commodities because these have become omnipresent. But having become omnipresent, they have lost their historical necessity.

Marx and Engels perhaps grasped less well than a Fourier the nature of communism as the liberation and harmonisation of the emotions. Fourier, however, does not get away from the wages system, since among other things he still wants doctors to be paid, even if according to the health of the community rather than the illnesses of their patients.

Marx and Engels, however, were sufficiently precise to avoid responsibility for the bureaucracy and financial system of the 'communist' countries being attributed to them. According to Marx, with the coming of communism money straightaway disappears and the producers cease to exchange their products. Engels speaks of the disappearance of commodity production when socialism comes."

The communist movement owes much to its time. In this early 21st century, we would be naïve to believe that we are wiser than our predecessors because *we* realize how destructive productive forces can be. Just as the nature of capitalism is invariant, so

are the nature and programme of the proletariat. This programme, however, cannot escape the concrete needs and mind-set of each period.

At the end of the 18th century, in a country plagued with misery, starvation and extreme inequality, and with still very few factory workers, Babeuf advocated an egalitarian mainly agrarian communism. His prime concern was to have everyone fed. It was inevitable, and indeed natural for down-trodden men and women to think of themselves as new Prometheus and to equate the end of exploitation with a conquest over nature.

About a hundred years later, as industrial growth was creating a new type of poverty, joblessness and non-property, revolutionaries saw the solution in a worker-run "development of the productive forces" that would benefit the masses by manufacturing the essentials of life and free humankind from the constraints of necessity. The prime concern was not only to have everyone fed, housed, nursed, but also in a position to enjoy leisure as well as creative activities. As capitalism had developed "the means of social disposable time, in order to reduce labour-time for the whole society to a diminishing minimum", revolution would be able "to free everyone's time for their own development." (Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1857-58)

Another century later, *ecology* is the buzz word. Nobody seriously believes in a factory-induced or a worker-managed paradise, new public orthodoxy declares the industrial dream to be a nightmare, so there is little merit in debunking the techno-cult or advocating renewable energy or green building.

The idea of communisation as a revolution that creates *communism* - and not the *preconditions* of communism - appears more clearly when capitalism rules over everything, extensively in terms of space (the much talked-about globalisation), and intensively in terms of its penetration into everyday life and behaviour. This helps us grasp revolution as a process that from its very beginning would start to undo what it wants to get rid of, and at the same time from its early days start to create new ways of life (the completion of which would of course last a while). That is the best possible answer to the inevitable question: "Why talk of communisation *now* ?"

One might wonder why the notion hardly surfaced in Italy 1969-77, when that country came closer than any other to revolutionary breaking point. Part of the answer is likely to be found in the reality of Italian worker autonomy at the time, in theory as in practice. Operaism emphasized more the revolutionary "subject" or agent than the content of the revolution, so the content finally got reduced to autonomy itself. That was linked to the limits of *operaismo*, whose goal was to create or stimulate organisation (top-down, party-led, or bottom-up, council-based). This may be the reason why a wealth of practical communist critiques and endeavours resulted in so little synthetic theorization of communisation. Apart from such hypotheses, it would be risky to embark on sweeping generalizations purporting to explain the (mis)adventures of theory in a particular country by the ups and downs of class struggle in that country. Unless one enjoys being word-drunk, there is little fun in playing the prophet of the past.

Transition ?

We would have nothing to object to the concept of transition if it simply stated the obvious: communism will not be achieved in a flash. Yet the concept implies a lot more,

and something totally different: not simply a transitory moment, but a full-fledged transitory *society*.

However debatable Marx's *labour vouchers* are, at least his *Critique of the Gotha programme* (1875) was trying to describe a society without money, therefore without wage-labour. His scheme of a time-based currency was supposed to be a provisional way of rewarding everyone according to his or her contribution to the creation of common wealth. Afterwards, when social-democrats and Leninists came to embrace the notion of transition, they forgot that objective, and their sole concern was the running of a planned economy. (Although anarchists usually reject a transitory period, they lay the emphasis on *management*, via worker unions or via a confederation of communes: in the best of cases, when the suppression of wage-labour remains on the agenda, it is only as an effect of the socialisation of production, not as one of its causes.)

It is obvious that such a deep and all-encompassing transformation as communism will span decades, perhaps several generations before it takes over the world. Until then, it will be straddling two eras, and remain vulnerable to internal decay and/or destruction from outside, all the more so as various countries and continents will not be developing new relationships at the same pace. Some areas may lag behind for a long time. Others may go through temporary chaos. But the main point is that the communising process has to start as soon as possible. The closer to Day One the transformation begins and the deeper it goes from the beginning, the greater the likelihood of its success.

So there will a "transition" in the sense that communism will not be achieved overnight. But there will **not** be a "transition period" in what has become the traditional Marxist sense: a period that is no longer capitalist but not yet communist, a period in which the working class would still work, but not for profit or for the boss any more, only for themselves: they would go on developing the "productive forces" (factories, consumer goods, etc.) before being able to enjoy the then fully-matured fruit of industrialization. This is not the programme of a communist revolution. It was not in the past and it is not now. There is no need to go on developing industry, especially industry as it is now. And we are not stating this because of the ecology movement and the anti-industry trend in the radical milieu. As someone said forty years ago, half of the factories will have to be closed.

Some areas will lag behind and others may plunge into temporary chaos. The abolition of money will result in fraternal, non-profit, cooperative relations, but sometimes barter or the black market are likely to surface. Nobody knows how we will evolve from false capitalist abundance to new ways of life, but let us not expect the move to be smooth and peaceful everywhere and all the time.

We will only modify our food habits, for example, as we modify our tastes: changing circumstances go along with changing minds, as was written in the third *Thesis on Feuerbach* in 1845. Our intention is not to create a *new man*, virtuous, reasonable, always able and willing to master his desires, always respectful of sound dietary rules. About a century ago, chestnuts were the staple food of some rural areas of the French Central Massif. Such a "poor" diet does not compare favourably with the variety we have been accustomed to in "rich" countries. But the future is written nowhere. We might well enjoy a more limited range of dishes than the abundance currently sold in the supermarket.

Violence and the destruction of the State

As a quick reminder, let us go back in time.

For reasons we cannot analyse here, the 1871 *communards* did not change much the social fabric: that, plus the insurrection being isolated in one city, prevented the *communards* from really appealing to the rest of the world, in spite of genuine popular support in Paris. Versailles army's superiority was not due to more troops or better guns: its law and order, pro-property and anti-worker programme was more consistently understood, put forward and fought for by the bourgeois politicians than communalism and social republicanism were by the Commune leaders.

In Russia, 1917, contrary to the *communards*, the Bolsheviks clearly knew what they wanted - the seizure of power - and the power vacuum enabled them to seize it. The insurgents did away with a State machinery which was already dissolving, did not attempt or manage to change the social structure, won a civil war, and eventually created a new State power.

In Spain, the July 1936 worker insurrection neutralised the State machinery, but within a few weeks gave political power back to reformist-conservative forces. Thereafter all social transformations were limited by the pressure of a reconsolidated State apparatus, which less than a year later openly turned its police against the workers.

In the 1960s, the radical wave opposed the instruments of coercion but never dispensed with them. The French general strike made the central political organs powerless, until the passive attitude of most strikers enabled the State to recover its role. The power vacuum could not last more than a few weeks, and had to be filled again.

This brief survey reminds us that if, in the abstract, it is necessary to separate *social* and *political* spheres, in real life, the separation does not exist. Our past failures were not social **or** political: they were both. Bolshevik rule would not have turned into power over the proletarians if they had changed social relationships, and in Spain after 1936 socialisations would not have ended in disaster if the workers had kept the power they had conquered in the streets in July 36.

Communisation means that revolution will not be a succession of phases: first the dismantling and destruction of State power, then social change afterwards.

While they are ready to admit this in principle, quite a few comrades, "anarchists" or "Marxists", are reluctant to consider the idea of a communisation which they fear would try and change the social fabric while *not* bothering to smash State power. These comrades miss the point. Communisation is not purely or mainly social and therefore non-political or only marginally political. It implies fighting public - as well as private - organs of repression. Revolution is violent. (By the way, which democratic revolution ever won merely by peaceful means ?)

Fundamentally, communisation saps counter-revolutionary forces by removing their support. Communisers' propulsive force will not come from shooting capitalists, but by depriving them of their function and power. Communisers will not target enemies, but undermine and change social relations. The development of moneyless and profitless relations will ripple through the whole of society, and act as power enhancers that widen the fault lines between the State and growing sections of the population. Our success will ultimately depend on the ability of our human community to be socially expansive. Such is the bottom line.

Social relations, however, are incarnated in buildings, in objects, and in beings of flesh and blood, and historical change is neither instantaneous nor automatic. Some obstacles will have to be swept away: not just exposed, but done away with. We will need more than civil disobedience: passive resistance is not enough. People have to take a stand, some will take sides against communisation, and a revolutionary trial of strength does not just battle with words. States (dictatorial or democratic) are enormous concentrations of armed power. When this armed power is unleashed against us, the greater the insurgents' fighting spirit, the more the balance of forces will shift away from State power, and the less bloodshed there will be.

An insurrectionary process does not just consist in occupying buildings, erecting barricades and firing guns one day, only to forget all about them the next. It implies more than mere spontaneity and *ad hoc* ephemeral getting together. Unless there is some continuity, our movement will skyrocket today and fizzle out tomorrow. A number of insurgents will have to remain organized and available as armed groupings. (Besides, nobody has talents or desires for everything.) But if these groupings functioned as bodies specialized in armed struggle, they would develop a monopoly of socially legitimate violence, soon we would have a "proletarian" police force, together with a "proletarian government", a "people's army", etc. Revolution would be short-lived.

No doubt this will have to be dealt with in very concrete issues, such as what to do with police files we happen to find. Though revolution may exceptionally use existing police archives and security agency data, basically it will do away with them, as with all kinds of criminal records.

Revolution is not a-political. It is anti-political.

Communisation includes the destruction of the State, and the creation of new administrative procedures, whatever forms they may take. Each dimension contributes to the other. None can succeed without the other. Either the two of them combine, or both fail. If the proletarians do not get rid of political parties, parliament, police bodies, the army, etc., all the socialisations they will achieve, however far-reaching, will sooner or later be crushed, or will lose their impetus, as happened in Spain after 1936. On the other hand, if the *necessary* armed struggle against the police and army is only a military struggle, one front against another, and if the insurgents do not also take on the social bases of the State, they will only build up a counter-army, before being defeated on the battlefield, as happened in Spain after 1936. Only a would-be State can out-gun the State.

Communist revolution does not separate its *means* from its *ends*. Consequently, it will not *firstly* take over (or dispense with) political power, and then only *secondly* change society. Both will proceed at the same time and reinforce each other, or both will be doomed.

Communisation can only happen in a society torn by mass work stoppages, huge street demos, widespread occupation of public buildings and workplaces, riots, insurgency attempts, a loss of control by the State over more and more groups of people and areas, in other words an upheaval powerful enough for social transformation to go deeper than an addition of piecemeal adjustments. Resisting anti-revolutionary armed bodies involves our ability to demoralise and neutralise them, **and** to fight back when they attack. As the momentum of communisation grows, it pushes its advantages, raises the stakes and resorts less and less to violence, but only a rose-tinted view can believe in bloodless major historical change.

At the Caracas World Social Forum in 2006, John Holloway declared: "the problem is not to abolish capitalism, but to stop creating it". This is indeed an aspect of communisation, equally well summed up by one of the characters in Ursula Le Guin's fiction *The Dispossessed* (1974): our purpose is not so much *to make* as *to be* the revolution. Quite. But J. Holloway's theory of "changing the world without taking power" empties that process of any reality by denying its antagonism to the State. Like Holloway, we don't want to *take* power. But unlike him and his many followers, we know that State power will not wither away under the mere pressure of a million local collectives: it will never die a natural death. On the contrary, it is in its nature to mobilize all available resources to defend the existing order. Communisation will not leave State power aside : it will have to destroy it.

The Chartists' motto "Peacefully if we may, forcibly if we must" is right only in so far as we understand that we will be forced to act "forcibly".

In revolutionary times, social violence and social inventiveness are inseparable: the capacity of the proletarians to control their own violence will depend on the ability of this violence to be as creative as destructive. For the destruction of the State (we want to destroy power, not to take it) to be more than an empty phrase, negative acts must also be positive. But not creative of a new police, army, Parliament, etc. Creative of new deliberative and administrative bodies, directly dependent on social relationships.

Who ?

"The proletarian movement is the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interests of that vast majority (..)" (*Communist Manifesto*). Both phrases are crucial : *independent movement* and *immense majority*. That being said, it does not follow that nearly everyone is a proletarian, nor that every proletarian can play the same part in the communising process. Some are more apt than others to initiate the change, which does not mean that they would be the "leaders" of the revolution. On the contrary, they would succeed only in so far as they would gradually lose their specificity. Here we bump into the inevitable contradiction the whole argument hinges around, but it is not an insurmountable contradiction. .

We do not live in a society where just about everybody is exploited and has the same basic interest in an overall change, therefore the same desire and ability to implement what would be a rather peaceful process, as nearly everyone would join in : only 3 to 5% would object, Castoriadis assured us, but no doubt they would soon see the light.

We live neither in a post-industrial society, nor in a post *class* society, nor therefore in a post working class society. If work had become inessential, one might wonder why companies would have bothered in the last twenty years to turn hundreds of millions of earthlings into assembly line workers, crane operators or computer clerks. Work is still central to our societies, and those in the world of work - currently employed or not - will have better social leverage power, at least in the early days or weeks of communisation.

The contradiction can be solved because, unlike the bourgeoisie striving for political power in 1688 (the *Glorious Revolution* that gave birth to what was to become English parliamentary democracy) or in 1789, labour is no ruling class and has no possibility of becoming one, now or then.

General strike, mass disorder and rioting break the normal flow of social reproduction. This suspension of automatisms and beliefs forces proletarians to invent something new that implies subjectivity and freedom: options have to be decided on. Everyone has to find his or her place, not as an isolated individual any more, but in interactions that are productive of a collective reality. When only railway workers go on strike, they are unlikely to look beyond their own condition: they simply do not have to. In a communisation situation, the extension of work stoppages opens the possibility for railway personnel to move on to a different range of activities decided upon and organized by themselves**and** by others: for instance, instead of staying idle, running trains - free of course - to transport strikers or demonstrators from one town to another. It also means starting to think and act differently about the railway system, no longer believing in feats of engineering for progress's sake, and no longer sticking to the view that "high-speed trains are super because they're fast".

What to do with high-speed trains and with buses cannot be the sole decision of train engineers and bus drivers, yet for a while the individual who used to be at the wheel will be more expert at handling and repairing them. His or her role will be specific and provisional. The success of communisation depends on the fading away of former sociological distinctions and hierarchies: breaching professional distances will go together with dismantling mental blocks regarding personal competence and aspiration. The process will be more complex than we expect, and more unpredictable: the experience of any large social movement (Germany 1918, Spain 1936, France 1968, Argentina 2001, to name a few) shows how volatile the unprecedented can be, when the situation slips out of control and creates both deadlocks and breakthroughs. One thing leads to another point of departure for further development. That particular example prompts the question of the fading of the difference between "public" and "private" transport, which in turn brings back the vital issue of where and how we live, since today's means of locomotion are conditioned by the urban segmentation of specific areas reserved for administration, habitation, work, recreation, etc.

Revolution of daily life

The trouble with philosophers, Polish novelist Witold Gombrowicz once suggested, is that they do not care about trousers and telephones. That remark hardly applied to Nietzsche, who was no revolutionary but refused "to treat as frivolous all the things about life that deserve to be taken very seriously - nutrition, residence, spiritual diet, treatment of the sick, cleanliness, weather !" (*Ecce Homo*, 1888). It is everyday life indeed we will change: cooking, eating, travelling, meeting people, staying on our own, reading, doing nothing, having and bringing up children, debating over our present and future... providing we give daily life its *fullest* meaning. Sadly, since the phrase became fashionable in 1968, "everyday life" has been usually limited to the out-of-work time-space, as if people gave up hope of altering the economy and wage-labour, and were contented with altering acts and doings of a lesser kind: feelings, body, family, sex, couple, food, leisure, culture, friendship, etc.

On the contrary, communisation will treat the minor facts of existence for what they are: a reflection and a manifestation of "big" facts. Money, wage-labour, companies as separate units and value accumulation centres, work-time cut off from the rest of our time, profit-oriented production, obsolescence-induced consumption, agencies acting as

mediators in social life and conflicts, speeded-up maximum circulation of everything and everyone... each of these moments, acts and places has to be transformed into cooperative, moneyless, profitless and non-statist relationships, and not just managed by a collective or converted into public ownership.

The capital-labour relation structures and reproduces society, and the abolition of this relation is the prime condition of the rest. But we would be foolish to wait for the *complete* disappearance of the company system, of money and the profit motive, before starting to change schooling and housing. Acting locally will contribute to the whole change.

For instance, communising also implies transforming our personal relation to technique, and our addiction to mediation and mediators. A future society where people would feel a constant need for psychologists, therapists and healers would merely prove its failure at building a human community: we would still be incapable of addressing tensions and conflicts by the flow and interplay of social relations, since we would want these conflicts solved by professionals.

Communisation is the destruction of repressive (and self-repressive) institutions and habits, as well as the creation of non-mercantile links which tend to be more and more irreversible: "Beyond a certain point, one cannot come back. That tipping-point we must reach." (Kafka)

Making, circulating and using goods without money includes breaking down the wall of a private park for the children to play, or planting a vegetable garden in the town centre. It also implies doing away with the split between the asphalt jungle cityscape and a natural world which is now turned into show and leisure places, where the (mild) hardships of a ten-day desert trek makes up for the aggravating compulsory Saturday drive to a crowded supermarket. It means practising in a social relation what has now to be private and paid for.

Communism is an **anthropological revolution** in the sense that it deals with what Marcel Mauss analysed in*The Gift* (1923): a renewed ability to give, receive and reciprocate. It means no longer treating our next-door neighbour as a stranger, but also no longer regarding the tree down the road as a piece of scenery taken care of by council workers. Communisation is the production of a different relation to others and with oneself, where solidarity is not born out of a moral duty exterior to us, rather out of practical acts and interrelations.

Among other things, communisation will be the withering away of systematic distinction between *learning* and*doing*. We are not saying that ignorance is bliss, or that a few weeks of thorough (self-)teaching are enough for anyone to be able to translate Arabic into English or to play the harpsichord. Though learning can be fun, it often involves long hard work. What communism will do away with is the locking up of youth in classrooms for years (now 15 to 20 years in so-called advanced societies). Actually, modern school is fully aware of the shortcomings of such an absurdity, and tries to bridge the gap by multiplying out-of-school activities and work experience schemes. These remedies have little effect: the rift between school and the rest of society depends on another separation, which goes deeper and is structural to capitalism: the separation between work (i.e. paid and productive labour), and what happens outside the work-place and is treated as non-work (housework, bringing up children, leisure, etc., which are unpaid). Only *superseding work as a separate time-space* will transform the whole learning process.

Here again, and in contrast to most utopias as well as to modern totalitarian regimes, communisation does not pretend to promote a "brave new world" full of *new (wo)men*, each equal in talents and in achievements to his or her fellow beings, able to master all fields of knowledge from Renaissance paintings to astrophysics, and whose own desires would always finally merge in harmonious concord with the desires of other equally amiable fellow beings.

Distant futures & "here and now"

Few people today would agree with what Victor Serge (then a Bolshevik living in Moscow) wrote in 1921: "Every revolution sacrifices the present to the future." While it is essential to understand how communisation will do *the opposite* of what Serge believed, this understanding does not give us the whole picture.

One of the strong points of the 1960s-70s, or at least one of the best remembered, was the rejection of a revolution that would postpone its completion to an always receding future.

In the following years, as the radical wave gradually ebbed, the emphasis on the *here and now* remained, albeit deprived of subversive content and purpose, and was reduced to an array of piecemeal changes in our daily life. When they are as all-powerful as they have become, money and wage-labour are compatible with - and sometimes feed on - inoffensive doses of relative freedom. Anyone can now claim that a certain degree of self-management of his neighbourhood, his body, his parenthood, his sexuality, his food, his habitat or his leisure time contributes to a genuine transformation of society, more genuine in fact than the old- fashioned social revolution of yesteryear. Indeed, daily life reformers claim to work for overall change by a multiplication of local changes: they argue that step by step, people's empowerment is taking over more and more social areas, until finally bourgeois rule is made redundant and the State rendered powerless. The ex-situationist Raoul Vaneigem perfectly encapsulated this vision in a few words (also the title of a book of his in 2010): "The State is nothing any more, let's be everything."

In the aftermath of "68", against Stalinism and Maoist or Trotskyst party-building, radical thought had to combat the reduction of revolution to a seizure of political power, and the postponement of effective change to later days that never came.

Thirty years later, Stalinism is gone, party-building is *passé*, and it is increasingly difficult to differentiate ex-Trots from current far leftists. While it pushes dozens of millions in or out of work, today's all-encompassing capitalism wears more often a hedonistic than a puritanical mask. It turns Victor Serge's formula upside down: "**Do not** sacrifice the present... ! Live and communicate *here and now* !"

Communising will indeed experiment new ways of life, but it will be much more and something other than an extension of the socially innocuous temporary or permanent "autonomous zones" where we are now allowed to play, providing we do not trespass their limits, i.e. if we respect the existence of wage-labour and recognize the benevolence of the State.

Commons ?

The Marxist-progressivist approach has consistently thrown scorn on pre-capitalist forms, as if they were incapable of contributing to communism: only industrialization was supposed to pave the way for proletarian revolution.

In the past and still in many aspects of *the present*, quite a few things and activities were owned by no-one and enjoyed by many. Community-defined rules imposed bounds on private property. Plough-sharing, unfenced fields and common pasture land used to be frequent in rural life. Village public meetings and collective decisions were not unusual, mostly on minor topics, sometimes on important matters.

While they provide us with valuable insights into what a possible future world would look like, and indeed often contribute to its coming, these habits and practices are unable to achieve this coming by themselves. A century ago, the Russian *mir* had neither the strength nor the intention of revolutionising society : rural cooperation depended on a social system and a political order that was beyond the grasp of the village autonomy. Nowadays, millions of co-ops meet their match when they attempt to play multinationals - unless they turn into big business themselves.

Our critique of progressivism does not mean supporting tradition against modernity. Societal customs have many oppressive features (particularly but not only regarding women) that are just as anti-communist as the domination of money and wage-labour. Communisation will succeed by being critical of both modernity and tradition. To mention just two recent examples, the protracted rebellion in Kabylia and the insurgency in Oaxaca have proved how collective links and assemblies can be reborn and strengthen popular resistance. Communisation will include the revitalization of old community forms, when by resurrecting them people get *more* than what they used to get from these forms in the past. Reviving former collective customs will help the communisation process by *transforming* these customs.

Community

Countless and varied visions of a future communist world have been suggested in modern times, by Sylvain Maréchal and G. Babeuf, Marx, even Arthur Rimbaud in 1871, Kropotkin and many anarchists, the Dutch council communists in the 1930s, etc. Their most common features may be summed up in the following equation:

communism =
direct democracy =
fulfilment of needs =
community + abundance =
equality

Since the historical subject of the future is envisioned as a self-organised human community, the big question is to know how it will organise itself. Who will lead : everybody, a few, or nobody ? Who will decide : the collectivity, or a wise minority ? Will the human species delegate responsibilities to a few persons, and if so, how ?

We will not go back here to the critique of democracy, which we have dealt with in other essays, and we will focus on one point: because the vast majority of revolutionaries

(Marxists and anarchists) regard communism above all as a new way of organising society, they are first of all concerned by how to find the best possible organisational forms, institutions in other words, be they fixed or adaptable, complex or extremely simple. (Individual anarchism is but another type of organisation : a coexistence of egos who are free and equal because each is independent of the others.)

We start from another standpoint: communism concerns as much the *activity* of human beings as their *inter-relations*. The way they relate to each other depends on what they **do** together. Communism organises production and has no fear of institutions, yet it is first of all neither institution nor production : it is activity.

The following sections only give a few elements on how *work* could be transformed into *activity*.

No money

Communising is not just making everything available to everyone without anyone paying, as if we merely freed instruments of production and modes of consumption from their commodity form: shopping made easy... without a purse or a Visa card.

The existence of money is often explained by the (sad, alas inevitable) need of having a means of distributing items that are too scarce to be handed out free: a bottle of Champagne has to have a price tag because there is little Champagne produced. Well, although millions of junk food items are manufactured every day, unless I give $ 1 in exchange for a bag of crisps, I am likely to get into trouble with the security guard.

Money is more than an unpleasant yet indispensable instrument : it materializes the way activities relate to one another, and human beings to one another. We keep measuring objects, comparing and exchanging them according to the average labour time (really or supposedly) necessary to make them, which logically leads to assessing acts and people in the same way.

The duality of *use value* and *exchange value* was born out of a situation where each activity (and the object resulting from it) ceased to be experienced and appreciated for what it specifically is, be it bread or a jar. From then on, that loaf of bread and that jar existed above all through their ability to be exchanged for each other, and were treated on the basis of what they had in common: in spite of their different concrete natures and uses, both they were comparable results of the same practice, labour in general, or abstract labour, liable to be reduced to a universal and quantifiable element, the average human effort necessary to produce that bread and that jar. Activity was turned into work. Money is crystallised labour: it gives a material form to that common substance.

Up to our time included, nearly all societies have found only work as a means to organise their life in common, and money connects what is separated by the division of labour.

A few millennia after "abstract labour" was born, capitalism has extended worldwide the condition of the proletarian, i.e. of the utterly dispossessed who can only live by selling his or her labour power on a free market. As the proletarian is the commodity upon which the whole commodity system depends, he or she has in himself or herself the possibility of subverting this system. A proletarian revolution can create a new type of social interaction where beings and things will not need to be compared and

quantified in order to be produced and circulated. Money and commodity will no longer be the highway to universality.

Therefore, communisation will not abolish *exchange value* while keeping *use value*, because one complements the other.

In quite a few past uprisings, in the Paris Commune or in October 1917, permanent armed fighters were *paid* as soldiers of the revolution, which is what they were.

From the early hours and days of a future communist revolution, the participants will neither need, use nor receive money to fight or to feed themselves, because goods will not be reduced to a quantum of something comparable to another quantum. Circulation will be based on the fact that each action and person is specific and does not need to be measured to another in order to exist.

Superficial critics of capitalism denounce finance and praise what is known as the "real" economy, but today a car or a bag of flour only have some use because they are treated (and acted upon) according to their cost in money terms, i.e. ultimately to the labour time incorporated in them. Nothing now seriously exists apart from its cost. It is unthinkable for parents who have a son and daughter to buy a car as birthday present for her and a T-shirt for him. If they do, everyone will measure their love for their two children according to the respective amount of money spent on each of them. In today's world, for objects, acts, talents and persons to exist socially, they have to be compared, reduced to a substance that is both common and quantifiable.

When building a house, there is a difference between making sure the builders will not be short of bricks and mortar (which we can safely assume communist builders will care about) and budgeting a house plan (which in this present society is a prior condition). Communisation will be our getting used to counting *physical realities* without resorting to accountancy. The pen and pencil (or possibly the computer) of the bricklayer are not the same as the double-entry book of the accounts department.

"In the communist revolution, the productive act will never be *only* productive. One sign of this among others will be the fact that the product considered will be particular: it will correspond to needs expressed *personally* (by the direct producers at the time or by others) and that the satisfaction of the need won't be separated from the productive act itself. Let's think, for example, about how the construction of housing will change as soon as standardization disappears. Production without productivity will mean that any individual engaged in the project will be in a position to give his opinion concerning the product and the methods. Things will go much slower than in today's industrialized building industry. The participants in the project may even wish to live there after the building is finished. Will it be a total mess? Let's just say that time will not count and that cases in which the project isn't completed, in which everything is abandoned in midstream - maybe because production of the inputs is without productivity too - won't be a problem. Again, this is because the activity will have found its justification in itself, independently of its productive result.

In a general way, one can say that communisation replaces the circulation of goods between "associated producers" with the circulation of people from one activity to another." (Bruno Astarian)

Critic after dinner

"In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic." (Marx, *German Ideology*, 1845)

This statement has been ridiculed by bourgeois for its naivety, and attacked by radicals for its acceptance of objectionable activities, hunting of course, more generally its endorsement of man's domination over animals. An even more critical view might ask why Marx reserves philosophy or art for the evening, as an afterthought, as if there was no time for it while producing food, which seems to take up most of the day in Marx's vision...

In 1845, Marx was providing no blueprint for the future, and he inserted his prejudices and preconceptions of his time. But *so do we today*, and we would be pretentious to think ourselves devoid of prejudices.

The most valid aspect of that statement remains the idea that people living in a communist world would not be tied to a trade or function for life, which still remains the fate of most of us. When this is not the case, mobility is often forced upon us: the least skilled usually get the worst jobs, the poorest pay and lowest social image, and they are the first to be laid off and pressured into a re-training scheme. Besides, "multi-tasking" is a way of making workers more productive.

As long as *work* exists *as such*, that is as a time-space reserved for production (and earning money), a hierarchy of skills will remain. Only the opening-up of productive acts to the rest of life will change the situation. Among other things, this implies the end of the present work-place as a specific distinct place, where only those involved in it are allowed in.

Scarcity vs. abundance : Prometheus unbound ?

For many a communist (once again, most Marxists and quite a few anarchists), the original cause of the exploitation of man by man was the emergence of a *surplus* of production in societies still plagued by *scarcity*. The tenets of the argument could be summarized as follows. For thousands of years, a minority was able to make the majority work for the benefit of a privileged few who kept most of the surplus for themselves. Fortunately, despite its past and present horrors, capitalism is now bringing about an unheard-of and ever-growing wealth: thereby the age-old need (and desire) to exploit and dominate loses its former objective cause. The poverty of the masses is no longer the condition for education, leisure and art to be enjoyed only by economic, political and cultural elites.

It is therefore logical that the goal (shared by most variants of the worker movement) should be to create a society of abundance. Against capitalism which forces us to work without fulfilling our needs, and distributes its products in most unequal fashion, revolution must organise the mass production of useful goods beneficial to all. And it *can*, thanks to the celebrated "development of the productive forces".

Besides, industrialization organises and unifies the working class in such numbers that they will have the means to topple the ruling class and make a revolution which Roman slaves or late medieval peasants attempted but were incapable of achieving.

Moreover, and this is no minor point, if money is the root of all evil, and if scarcity is the ultimate cause of money, such a vision believes that reaching a stage of abundance will transform humankind. When men and women are properly fed, housed, schooled, educated, cared for, "struggle for life" antagonisms and attitudes will gradually disappear, individualism will give way to altruism, people will behave well to each other and have no motive, therefore no desire, for greed, domination or violence. So the only real question that remains is how to adequately manage this society of abundance : in a democratic way, or via leaders ? with Kropotkin's moneyless system of helping oneself to goods that are plentiful, and democratic rationed sharing-out of goods that are not plentiful ? or with some labour-time accounting as suggested by the Dutch councilists in the 1930s ? The answer usually given by anarchists and non-Leninist communists is a society of "associated producers" run by worker collectives. Whatever the details, all these schemes describe a different*economy*, but an economy all the same: they start from the assumption that social life is based on the necessity to allocate resources in the best possible way to produce goods (in the genuine and democratically-decided interests of all, there lies the difference with bourgeois economy).

This is precisely where we beg to differ.

Women and men must eat (among other necessities)... or die, there is no denying it. Basic needs do exist. So, of course we are aiming at society which fairly, soundly and ecologically matches resources with needs. What we dispute is that human life consists primarily in fulfilling needs, and that, logically, revolution should primarily consist in creating a society where physical needs are fulfilled. Human beings only satisfy - or fail to satisfy - all their needs within social interrelations. Only in extreme circumstances do we eat just in order not to starve. In most cases, we eat in the company of others (or we decide or are led or forced to eat on our own, which also is a social situation). We follow a diet. We may overeat or voluntarily skip a meal. This is true of nearly all other social acts. Contrary to widespread popular misbelief, the "materialistic conception of history" (as exposed in *The German Ideology* for example) does not say that the economy rules the world. It states something quite different: social relations depend on the way we produce our material conditions of life, and not, say, on our ideas or ideals. And we produce these material conditions in relation to other beings (in most societies, these are class relations). A plough, a lathe or a computer does not determine history by itself. In fact, the "materialistic conception" explains the present rule of the economy as a historical phenomenon, which did not exist in Athens 500 B.C., and will no longer exist after a communist revolution.

The human Number One question, or the revolution question, is not to find how to bridge the gap between resources and needs (as economists would have it), nor to turn artificial and extravagant needs into natural and reasonable ones (as ecologists would like us to). It is to understand basic needs for what they are. Communism obviously takes basic needs into account, especially in a world where about one billion people are underfed. But how will this vital food issue be addressed ? As *Hic Salta* explained in 1998, the natural urge to grow food, potatoes for instance, will be met through the birth of social links which will also result in vegetable gardening. Communisers will not say: "Let's grow potatoes because we need to feed ourselves." Rather, they will imagine and invent a way to meet, to get and be together, that will include vegetable gardening and be productive of potatoes. Maybe potato growing will require more time than under

capitalism, but that possibility will not be evaluated in terms of labour-time cost and saving.

"When communist *artisans* associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need - the need for society - and what appears as a means becomes an end." (*1844 Manuscripts*)

A typical feature of what we have been used to calling "the economy" is to produce goods separately from needs (which may be "natural" or "artificial", authentic or manipulated, that matters but is not essential at this point), before offering them on a market where they will be bought to be consumed.

"Socialism" or "communism" has usually been thought of as the symmetrical opposite of *that* economy: it would start from people's needs (real ones, this time, and collectively decided upon) to produce accordingly and distribute fairly.

Communism is not a new "economy", even a regulated, bottom-up, decentralized and self-managed one.

To use K. Polanyi's word in *The Great Transformation* (1944), capitalism has *disembedded* the production of the means of existence from both social life and nature. No Marxist and certainly not a communist, Polanyi was not opposed to the existence of a market, but he analysed the institution of the economic process as a distinct system with its own laws of motion. *The Great Transformation*, written in the aftermath of the Great Depression, coincided with a capitalist effort to regulate market forces. In the last decades, there has been a renewed interest in Polanyi's emphasis on "embeddedness": many reformers would like the economy to be brought under social control, in order to create a sustainable relationship with nature. Unfortunately, as the liberals are right to point out, we cannot have the advantages of capitalism without its defects: its regulation is a momentary step before going into overdrive. To do away with capitalist illimitation, we must go beyond the market itself and the economy as such, i.e. beyond capital and wage-labour.

As we wrote in the section on "the revolution of daily life", communisation will be tantamount to an*anthropological* change, with a re-embedding of organic links that were severed when the economy came to dominate both society and nature.

Equality

There would be no communist movement without our spontaneous indignation when we witness a Rolls-Royce driving by slums. Sylvain Maréchal, Babeuf's comrade, wrote in the *Manifesto of the Equals* (1796):

"No more individual property in land: *the land belongs to no one*. We demand, we want, the common enjoyment of the fruits of the land: *the fruits belong to all*.

We declare that we can no longer put up with the fact that the great majority work and sweat for the smallest of minorities.

Long enough, and for too long, less than a million individuals have disposed of that which belongs to 20 million of their like, their equals."

S. Maréchal's statement was asserting the existence of a human species whose members are similar and should have a fair share of available resources.

Communisation demands a fraternity that involves, among other things, *mutual aid* as theorized by Kropotkin, and equality as expressed in *The Internationale* lines: "There are no supreme saviours/Neither God, nor Caesar, nor tribune".

But *equality is not to be achieved by book-keeping*. As long as we measure in order to share out and "equalize", inequality is sure to be present. Communism is not a "fair" distribution of riches. Even if, particularly at the beginning and under the pressure of circumstances, our priority may sometimes be to share goods and resources in the most equitable way (which, whether we like it or not, amounts to some form of rationing), our prime motive and mover will not be the best and fairest way to circulate goods, but our human links and the activities that result from them.

Universality

Where do capitalism's powerful drive and resilience come from ? Undoubtedly from its amazing and always renewed capacity to invent advanced ways of exploiting labour, to raise productivity, to accumulate and circulate wealth. But also from its fluidity, its ability to supersede rigid forms, to remodel hierarchy and discard vested interests when it needs to, not forgetting its adaptability to the most varied doctrines and regimes. This plasticity has no precedent in history. It derives from the fact that capitalism has no other motive than to create abstract value, to maximize its flow, and eventually to set in motion and accumulate more figures than goods.

That aspect is documented enough for us not to go into details. What matters here is that capitalist civilization develops extreme individualism, while creating a *universality* of sorts, which is also a form of *freedom* (of which democracy is the political realization): it breeds and favours a new type of human being potentially disconnected from the ties of tradition, land, birth, family, religion and established creeds. In the 21st century, the modern Londoner eats a banana grown in the West Indies (where she was holidaying last week), watches an Argentinean film, chats up an Australian woman on the Internet, rents a Korean car, and from her living-room accesses any classical or outrageously avant-garde work of art as well as all schools of thought. Capitalism is selling her no less than an infinity of possibilities. Fool's gold, we might object, because it is made of passivity and spectacle in the situationist sense, instead of truly lived-in experience. Indeed... Yet, however specious this feeling of empowerment, it socially "functions" as it is able to arouse emotion and even passion.

We would be wrong to assume that a period when communisation is possible and attempted would automatically and quickly eliminate the appeal of false riches - material or spiritual. Two centuries of modern capitalist evolution have taught us how resourceful that system can prove. In troubled times, social creativity will not only be on our side: in order to ride out the storm, capitalism also will put forward authenticity and collectiveness. It will provide the individual with opportunities to go beyond his atomized self. It will suggest critiques of "formal" democracy, defend planet Earth as a shared heritage, oppose cooperation to competition and use to appropriation. In short, it will pretend to change everything... except capital and wage-labour.

The communist perspective has always put forward an unlimited development of human potentials. Materially speaking: everyone should be able to enjoy all the fruits of the world. But also in the "behavioural" field, in order to promote, harmonize and fulfil

talents and desires. The surrealists ("absolute freedom") and the situationists ("to live without restraints") went even further and extolled the subversive merits of transgression.

Today, the most advanced forms of capitalism turn this critique back on us. Current Political Correctness and its Empire of Good leave ample room for provocation, for verbal and often factual transgression. Let us take a look at the many screens that surround us: compared to 1950, the boundary is increasingly blurred between what is sacred and profane, forbidden and allowed, private and public. English readers had to wait until 1960 to buy the unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* : fifty years later, on-line pornography, whatever that word covers, is widespread (according to some figures, 12% of all sites and 25% of Internet searches deal with pornography). Contemporary counter-revolution will appeal much less to moral order than it did in the 1920s and 30s, and often have a "liberal-libertarian" and permissive-transgressive flavour. Communisation, on the other hand, will prevail by giving birth to ways of life that will tend to be universal, but not dominated by addiction, virtuality and public imagery.

The inescapable contradiction

Communisation will be possible because those who make the world can also unmake it, because the class of labour (whether its members are currently employed or out of a job) is also the class of the critique of work. Unlike the exploited in pre-capitalist times, wage-earners can put an end to exploitation, because commodified (wo)men have the means to abolish the realm of commodity. It is the *working class / proletariat* duality we are talking about: a class, as Marx put it in 1844, which is not a class while it has the capacity to terminate class societies.

Marxists often turn this definition into formulaic dialectics. Non-Marxists make fun of it: the French liberal Raymond Aron used to say that the "working class" is worthy of the fine name "proletariat" when it acts in a (revolutionary) way that suits Marxists. Anyone who takes this definition seriously cannot evade the obvious: this duality is *contradictory*. Those who handle the modern means of production and have thereby the ability to subvert the world, are**also** those with a vested interest in the "development of the productive forces", including utterly destructive ones, and are often caught up, willy-nilly, not just in the defence of their own wages, shop-floor conditions and jobs, but also of industry, of the ideology of work and the myth of progress.

We have no other terrain apart from this contradiction. It dramatically exploded in January 1919, when a few thousand Spartakist insurgents went to battle amidst the quasi indifference of several hundred thousand Berlin workers. Communisation will be the positive resolution of the contradiction, when the proletarians are able and willing to solve the social crisis by superseding capitalism. Therefore communisation will also be a settling of scores of the proletarian with him/herself.

Until then, and as a contribution to this resolution, communist theory will have to acknowledge the contradiction, and proletarians to address it.

For further reading

(We have also published an essay in French on Communisation, available on our site. This English version is much shorter, but also different : a few passages have been expanded.)

Essential reading :

To the best of our knowledge, *Un monde sans argent* has not been translated in English, except for short extracts published in the SPGB magazine *Socialist Standard* (July 1979) : John Gray "For communism" site : reocities.com

Bruno Astarian, *Crisis Activity & Communisation*, 2010: hicsalta-communisation.net (with other texts by B. Astarian on communism)

Background information on how the "communisation" idea became explicit in the 1970s :

The Story of Our Origins (part of an article from *La Banquise*, # 2, 1983): John Gray "For communism" site: reocities.com

For the complete article: *Re-collecting Our Past* : libcom.org

(Also: *Are the Revolutionaries One Counter-revolution Behind ?*, from *La Banquise*, # 3, 1984: libcom.org)

And :

Endnotes, # 1 and 2: 56a Infoshop, 56 Crampton St., London SE 17 3 AE, UK; and: endnotes.org

Théorie Communiste (R. Simon, 84300 Les Vignères, France). Among other texts, *Communisation vs. socialization* : meeting.communisation.net

TPTG (Ta Paidia Tis Galarias, or : "The Children in the Gallery", a group in Greece), *The Ivory Tower of Theory : a Critique of Théorie Communiste & « The Glass Floor »* : libcom.org

A. Pannekoek, *The Theory of the collapse of capitalism* (1934): marxists.org

On the Russian and Spanish revolutions : *When Insurrections Die* (1999),on the troploin site

V. Serge's *The Anarchists & the Experience of the Russian Revolution* (1921), is included in the V. Serge compendium *Revolution in Danger*, Redwords, London, 1997.

On the *mir* and Russian populism: F. Venturi, *The Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist & Socialist Movement in 19th Century Russia*, first published in 1952.

On democracy: *The Implosion of Democratist Ideology*, 1989: "For Communism" website; and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Autonomy*, 2008, available on our site.

Marx, letter to Vera Zasulich, March 1881; and : "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development." (preface to the 1882 edition of the *Communist Manifesto*); also another letter to V. Zasulich, by Engels, April 23, 1985.

Group of International Communists of Holland (GIK), *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production & Distribution* (1930): reocities.com

S. Maréchal, *Manifesto of the Equals* (1796) : marxis

ts.org

The value-form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most universal form of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character.2

In *Endnotes* 1 we described the emergence of the theory of communisation in France in the years following May 68. The following text and others in this issue operate within this perspective of communisation, but they also draw heavily upon theoretical developments in the area of Marxian value-form theory and, in particular, upon the tendency of "systematic dialectic" which has emerged in recent years.3

Marx was clear that what distinguished his approach, and what made it a critique rather than a continuation of political economy, was its analysis of the form of value. In his celebrated exposition of "The Fetish-Character of the Commodity and its Secret" he writes:

Political economy has indeed analysed value and its magnitude, however incompletely, and has uncovered the content concealed within this form. But it has never once asked the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, why labour is expressed in value, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product. These forms, which bear the unmistakable stamp of belonging to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite, appear to the political economists' bourgeois consciousness to be as much a self-evident and nature-imposed necessity as productive labour itself.4

Despite such statements by Marx, the connection between the value-form and fetishism — the inversion where humans are dominated by the results of their own activity — did not play much role in the interpretation of *Capital* until the 1960s. Instead, accounts of "Marx's economics" emphasised the apparently simple argument in the first two sections of chapter one of *Capital,* where labour is identified as lying behind the value of commodities. The latter two sections of the chapter — on the value-form and fetishism — were generally taken as a more or less convoluted way of describing the market, and passed over quickly. Thus the careful way Marx distinguished his understanding from the classical political economy of Ricardo was not explored.5

When Marxists insisted on the "labour theory of value", they did so in terms of the quantitative issue of the substance and magnitude of value rather than the qualitative issue of the *form* of value. Against the neo-classical revolution in bourgeois economics, which repudiated the labour theory of value, Marxists tended to assert the classical position that labour is the substance of value and that value is the labour embodied in the product. Like the classical political economists, Marxists failed to address the peculiarity of the social process of reduction that is necessary for such quantitative magnitudes to be compared. That is to say, they too did not ask the question of why labour appears in the value-form of its product, and what kind of labour can so appear. Yet as Marx indicates, it is only by understanding the intricacy of the value-form that one can understand the subsequent forms of money and capital, or how human activity takes the form of the accumulation of capital.

For Marx, the value-form is an expression of the dual character of labour in capitalism — its character as concrete labour appearing in the use-value of the commodity, and its character as abstract labour appearing in the value-form. Though abstract labour is historically specific to capitalism, the failure to properly distinguish these two aspects of labour means that the value-form is taken as an expression of simple natural human labour as such. Labour as the content or substance of value was seen to be physiological labour — something independent of its social form. Here substance is taken to be something that naturally resides in the object, but for Marx abstract labour and value are more peculiar than that. Value is a relation or process that unfolds itself and maintains itself through different forms — in one moment money, the next the commodities that compose the labour process (including the commodity labour-power), the next the commodity product, and then again money — whilst always maintaining a relation in its money form to its commodity form and vice versa. For Marx then, value is not the embodiment of labour in the commodity, nor an unmoving substance. It is rather a relation or process which dominates those who bear it: a substance that is at the same time subject. Yet in the orthodox Marxist tradition there was no recognition that "abstract labour" was a socially and historically specific formatting of one part of human activity, implying the conversion of human beings into a resource for the boundless increase of this activity and its result as an end in itself. Understanding value as merely a form imposed — by the private ownership of the means of production — on a basic unproblematic content, went together with a vision of socialism as a state-directed version of essentially the same industrial division of labour that is organised by the market in capitalism. On this view labour, which was restricted by market forms under capitalism, would become the conscious organising principle of society in socialism.

A major exception to the traditional Marxist neglect of the value-form and fetishism was the Russian economist Isaak Rubin. In path-breaking work in the twenties, he recognised that "[t]he theory of fetishism is, *per se*, the basis of Marx's entire economic system and in particular of his theory of value,"[6]and that abstract labour as the content of value is not "something to which form adheres from the outside. Rather, through its development, the content itself gives birth to the form which was already latent in the content."[7] But Rubin's work, suppressed in Russia, remained more or less unknown. For the orthodoxy — "Marxist political economy" — the fact that bourgeois critics saw Marx as essentially a follower of Ricardo was not contested. Rather, he was defended *on exactly this basis* as having correctly tidied up Ricardo's recognition of labour as the content of value, and of labour-time as its magnitude — adding only a more or less left-Ricardian theory of exploitation. On this view labour is something that exists quasi-naturalistically in the product, and exploitation is seen as an issue of the distribution of that product — thus the "solution" to capitalism is seen as workers, via the state or other means, shifting that distribution in their favour. If exploitation is a matter of the deduction of a portion of the social product by a parasitic ruling class then socialism does not have to substantially alter the form of commodity production; but may simply take it over, eliminate the parasitic class, and distribute the product equitably.

The occlusion of form and fetishism within the reading of *Capital* only began to be seriously challenged from the mid-1960s — partly through a rediscovery of Rubin — in a number of approaches that have at one time or another been labelled "value-form

theory." The debates on the subtleties of the value-form, on issues of method, on the question of Marx's relation to Hegel and so on, emerged then, at the same moment as the theory of communisation. Both value-form theory and communisation express dissatisfaction with received interpretations of Marx, and thus a rejection of "orthodox" or "traditional" Marxism.8 For us, there is an implicit commonality between value-form theory and the theory of communisation such that each may productively inform the other. We will here examine the historical parallels, and points of convergence, between these two tendencies.

From the middle of the 1960s to the late 70s capitalism at a world level was characterised by intense class struggles and radical social movements: from the urban uprisings in the *USA* to insurrectionary strikes in Poland, from student movements and "youth revolt" to the toppling of elected and unelected governments by workers' unrest. Accepted relations at work were questioned, as was the family, gender and sexuality, mental health, and humans' relationship to nature, in a general contestation across society. Intertwined with these struggles, the post-war boom ended in a crisis of capitalist accumulation with high inflation and rising unemployment. The revolutionary overcoming of capitalism and its pseudo-alternative in the eastern countries seemed to many to be on the agenda.

The emergence of both the critical Marxism of value-form theory and the theory of communisation was premised on these struggles and the revolutionary hopes they engendered. Just as these two tendencies were produced in the same moment, they waned simultaneously with the wave of struggles that had produced them. The 70s crisis of accumulation, rather than leading to an intensification of struggles and their development in a revolutionary direction, actually gave rise to a radical capitalist restructuring in which the movements and the revolutionary expectations linked to them were comprehensively defeated. This restructuring led to the relative eclipse of these discussions. Just as the discussion of communisation in France emerged in the early 70s, only to fade away in the 80s and early 90s before resurfacing again recently, contemporary interest in "systematic dialectic" is in many ways a return to the value-form debates of the 70s, after a period when the discussion had gone relatively quiet.

It is not the *unity* of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital.9

The theory of communisation emerged as a critique of various conceptions of the revolution inherited from both the 2nd and 3rd International Marxism of the workers' movement, as well as its dissident tendencies and oppositions. The experiences of revolutionary failure in the first half of the 20th century seemed to present as the essential question, whether workers can or should exercise their power through the party and state (Leninism, the Italian Communist Left), or through organisation at the point of production (anarcho-syndicalism, the Dutch-German Communist Left). On the one hand some would claim that it was the absence of the party — or of the right kind of party — that had led to revolutionary chances being missed in Germany, Italy or Spain, while on the other hand others could say that it was precisely the party, and the "statist,"

"political" conception of the revolution, that had failed in Russia and played a negative role elsewhere.

Those who developed the theory of communisation rejected this posing of revolution in terms of *forms*of organisation, and instead aimed to grasp the revolution in terms of its *content*. Communisation implied a rejection of the view of revolution as an event where workers take power followed by a period of transition: instead it was to be seen as a movement characterised by immediate communist measures (such as the free distribution of goods) both for their own merit, and as a way of destroying the material basis of the counter-revolution. If, after a revolution, the bourgeoisie is expropriated but workers remain workers, producing in separate enterprises, dependent on their relation to that workplace for their subsistence, and exchanging with other enterprises, then whether that exchange is self-organised by the workers or given central direction by a "workers' state" means very little: the capitalist content remains, and sooner or later the distinct role or function of the capitalist will reassert itself. By contrast, the revolution as a communising movement would destroy — by ceasing to constitute and reproduce them — all capitalist categories: exchange, money, commodities, the existence of separate enterprises, the state and — most fundamentally — wage labour and the working class itself.

Thus the theory of communisation arose in part from the recognition that opposing the Leninist party-state model with a different set of organisational forms — democratic, anti-authoritarian, councils — had not got to the root of the matter. In part, this new kind of thinking about revolution arose from the characteristics and forms of the class struggle which came to the fore in this period — such as sabotage, absenteeism and other forms of refusal of work — and from social movements outside the workplace, all of which could be seen to reject the affirmation of work and of workers' identity as the basis of revolution. A great spur to the development of the notion of communisation was the work of the *Situationist International* (*SI*) who, with their perspective of a total revolution rooted in the transformation of everyday life, had felt and theorised the new needs being expressed in struggles, and thus were later recognised as best anticipating and expressing the spirit of the 1968 events in France.

But if the concept of communisation was in a sense a product of the struggles and developments of the time, the capacity of the French milieu to give expression to it was inseparable from a return to Marx, and in particular the discovery and diffusion of the "unknown Marx" of texts such as the *Grundrisse* and the *Results of the Direct Production Process* (hereafter *Results*). Before these texts became available in the late sixties, the SI and other critics of orthodox Marxism had tended to draw on the early Marx such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. Even in the case of the SI and the Frankfurt School, where there was also use of a theory of fetishism and reification drawn from *Capital*, this was mediated through Lukács, and not a product of a detailed appropriation of the three volumes of*Capital*. Thus the mature critique of political economy as a whole tended to be left in the hands of traditional Marxism. As we have already indicated, the relevance of Marx's description of his work as a*critique* of political economy, the importance of the value-form and of fetishism, were overwhelmingly missed within this positivistic interpretation. The newly available texts such as the *Grundrisse*undermined the traditional readings and allowed the radicality of the mature critique to be recognised.

Through their marginal relation to orthodox Marxism, those who identified with left-communist critiques of Bolshevism and of what had happened in Russia were in a good position to read the newly available Marx texts. Very important in the French context was Jacques Camatte and the journal *Invariance* which first appeared in 1968. As well as expressing an opening up of the heritage of the 'Bordigist' Italian Left tradition both to the experience of the Dutch-German left, and to the unfolding struggles of the time,*Invariance* was a place for a fresh reading of Marx. Camatte's one-time collaborator — Roger Dangeville — translated the *Grundrisse* and the *Results* into French — putting a spanner in the works of the Althusserian anti-Hegelian interpretation of Marx dominant in France. In *Invariance* Camatte published an important commentary on these texts.10

Camatte's text played a similar role for the French post-68 discussions to that played at the same time by Rosdolsky's *The Making of Marx's Capital* for the discussions that were to follow in Germany.11 Both rely heavily on quotations to introduce and explore the significance of texts by Marx that were largely unknown at the time. Rosdolsky provides a comprehensive study of the *Grundrisse,* while Camatte's less systematic account draws on other of Marx's drafts, in particular the *Results*. While Camatte acknowledges the merits of Rosdolsky's book,12 a difference is that while Rosdolsky ultimately reduces the *Grundrisse* to a mere preparation for *Capital,* Camatte is more attuned to the way in which it, and the other drafts of *Capital,* point beyond the understanding Marxists had derived from the latter work. Camatte recognised that the different ways Marx introduced and developed the category of value in the various versions of the critique of political economy have a significance beyond a progressive improvement of the presentation. Some of the earlier treatments bring out aspects such as the historical autonomisation of value, the definition of capital as value in process, and the importance of the category of subsumption, in ways that are not as clear in the published versions. One finds in Camatte's reading of the newly available texts a recognition that the implications of Marx's critique of political economy were far more radical than the positivistic Marxist interpretation of *Capital* had taken them to be.13

There is a fascinating break from traditional Marxist assumptions in Camatte's work, one that is brought out sharply in the contrast between his original commentary from the mid-sixties and the notes he added in the early seventies. Thus while the earlier commentary grapples with the classical Marxist theory of the transition, in the later notes we see the assumptions of this theory overthrown.14 Thus Camatte concludes his 1972 remarks with a call for communisation:

The near totality of men rising against the totality of capitalist society, the struggle simultaneously against capital and labour, two aspects of the same reality: i.e. the proletariat must struggle against its own domination so as to be able to destroy itself as class and to destroy capital and classes. Once victory is assured worldwide, the universal class which is really constituted (formation of the party according to Marx) during a huge process preceding the revolution in the struggle against capital, and which is psychologically transformed and has transformed society, will disappear, because it becomes humanity. There are no groups outside it. Communism then develops freely. Lower socialism no longer exists, and the phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat is reduced to the struggle to destroy capitalist society, the power of capital.15

For most subsequent theorists of communisation, the previously unavailable writings of Marx became basic texts. The translation of the *Grundrisse* and its now

famous “fragment on machines” directly informed Gilles Dauvé’s prototypical argument for communisation.[16] In this fragment Marx describes how capital, in its drive to increase surplus labour time, reduces necessary labour time to a minimum through the massive application of science and knowledge to production. This creates the possibility of the appropriation by all of that alienated system of knowledge, allowing the re-appropriation of this surplus labour time as disposable time. Communism is thus understood not in terms of a new distribution of the same sort of wealth based in labour time, but as founded on a new form of wealth measured in disposable time.[17] Communism is about nothing less than a new relation to time, or even a different kind of time. For Dauvé, by this focus on time, Marx implies a radical break between capitalism and communism which “exclude[s] the hypothesis of any *gradual* way to communism through the progressive destruction of the law of value” and thus proves the councilist and democratic alternative to Leninism as itself inadequate.[18]

The earlier drafts also pointed towards a more radical concept of revolution at a more fundamental ontological level. The drafts reveal that for Marx the critique of political economy calls into question the division of subjectivity and objectivity, the givenness of what it is to be an individual, and what is, and is not, our very being. For Marx these ontological questions are essentially *social*. He considered that the political economists had more or less succeeded in clarifying the categories which grasped the social forms of life under capitalism. While the bourgeoisie, however, tended to present these as ahistorical necessities, Marx recognised them as historically specific forms of the relationship between humans, and between humans and nature. The fact that human activity is mediated by social relations between things generates an atomised, object-less character to human subjectivity. The individual experience in capitalism is one of pure subjectivity, with all objectivity existing against it in the form of capital:

> *Separation of property from labour* appears as the necessary law of this exchange between capital and labour. Labour posited as *not-capital* as such is: (1) *not-objectified labour, conceived negatively* [...] separated from all means and objects of labour, from its entire objectivity. This living labour, existing as an abstraction from these moments of its actual reality (also, not-value); this complete denudation, purely subjective existence of labour, stripped of all objectivity. Labour as *absolute poverty*: poverty not as shortage, but as total exclusion of objective wealth. [...] (2) *Not-objectified labour, not-value*, conceived *positively*, or as a negativity in relation to itself [...]. Labour not as an object, but as activity; not as itself *value*, but as the *living source* of value. [T]he in-every-way mutually contradictory statements that labour is *absolute poverty as object*, on one side, and is, on the other side, the *general possibility* of wealth as subject and as activity, are reciprocally determined and follow from the essence of labour, such as it is *presupposed* by capital as its contradiction and as its contradictory being, and such as it, in turn, presupposes capital.[19]

Such ontological considerations play a major role in the work of *Théorie Communiste* (*TC*), a group that emerged in the mid-seventies from the discussions of the post-68 communisation milieu. For *TC* the communist revolution understood as communisation does not establish a “republic of labour” or any new form of management of the means of production. Rather, it is the overcoming of the alienated social relation of production which constitutes the separation of subjectivity and objectivity experienced in capitalism. In the overcoming of the separation of individuals from each other and from the means of production, communisation overcomes the

separation of human subjectivity from "objectified labour,"[20] i.e. the subject/object split that forms the basis of social reality under capitalism. *TC* envisage this as an overcoming of each dimension which Marx describes in the *Grundrisse*: labour ceases to exist as a separate activity; production no longer distinguishes itself from and dominates reproduction; needs are no longer separate from capacities; and individuals no longer confront their sociality through the mediation of the exchange of their products or in the form of the state — they become *directly* social. The revolution as communisation dissolves both the social form of things, i.e. their existence as carriers of 'objectified labour', of value (they become things again), and the atomised, empty and separated out subject-form of the individual. Thus for *TC*, as for Marx in the*Grundrisse*,[21] the formerly "objective" moment of production no longer dominates the subjective, but rather becomes "the organic social body in which the individuals reproduce themselves as individuals, but as social individuals."[22]

The fresh appropriation of Marx out of which the perspective of communisation arose was part of a much wider process of the re-appropriation and development of radical readings of Marx. After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, official communism no longer had a hegemony over dissent and the interpretation of Marx in Western countries. While Marx had said "doubt everything," orthodox or traditional Marxism tended to present itself as a unified worldview with an answer to every question. It had an all-embracing philosophy ("Dialectical Materialism"), a mechanistic view of history ("Historical Materialism"), and its own economics ("Marxist Political Economy").[23] These pillars of the official version of Marxism were called into question by a return to Marx's critical spirit, in much the same way that an earlier generation of critical Marxism had flowered in the immediate wake of the Russian revolution.[24]

The revitalisation of Marxian theory in this period — as in the twenties — involved a break from seeing Marxism as a positive system of knowledge, and a re-recognition of its critical dimension — a move in which Marx's relation to Hegel was again in question. By the mid-sixties, the rejection of received interpretations of Marx began to extend to *Capital* — his central work. New readings drew on earlier drafts of the critique of political economy, and were interested not just in the results Marx arrived at, but also in the method he used to get there. In France *Capital* was reread in a structuralist fashion, in Italy Tronti and *Operaismo* took it up "from the point of view of the working class," and in Germany there arose a *Neue Marx-Lektüre* (New Marx Reading).

The German language gave the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* a clear advantage over investigations into Marx in other countries. The new texts of the "unknown Marx" generally became available and known in German before any other language, and there were of course no issues of translation.[25] Furthermore, the great cultural resource that Marx had used in the critique of political economy — classical German idealism — was not subject to the same problems of the reception of Hegelian thought as in other countries. Thus, while in Italy and France the new readings of Marx tended to have a strong anti-Hegel bias as a reaction against earlier fashions for Hegelianism and "Hegelian Marxism", the German discussions were able to develop a more nuanced and informed picture of the Hegel-Marx connection. Crucially they saw that in describing the logical structure of the real totality of capitalist social relations, Marx in *Capital* was indebted not so much to Hegel's conception of a historical dialectic, but to the systematic dialectic of the *Logic*. The new critical Marxism, sometimes disparagingly referred to as *Kapitallogik*, thus had less in common with the earlier critical Marxism of

Lukács and Korsch than with that of Rubin and Pashukanis. The *Neue Marx-Lektüre* was not a homogeneous school but a critical approach involving serious arguments and disagreements that nonetheless shared a certain direction.

The political context for the German debates was the rise of a radical student movement. The movement had two poles — one traditionalist, sometimes with links to the East German state and with an "orthodox Marxist" orientation to the labour movement, and a stronger "anti-authoritarian" pole influenced by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, particularly its psychoanalytic dimension, which offered an explanation for why workers seemed uninterested in the revolution.[26] Due in no small part to the influence of the Frankfurt School, the German student movement quickly gained a reputation for the theoretical sophistication of its debates. The insights but also the instability and ambivalence of the "anti-authoritarian" pole were expressed in the trajectory of its charismatic leader Rudi Dutschke. In 1966, influenced strongly by Korsch, he historicised Marx's "two stages theory" of the communist revolution as anachronistic and "highly questionable for us" since it "postpones the real emancipation of the working class in the future and considers seizing the bourgeois state by the proletariat as being of primary importance for social revolution."[27] Yet he also coined the slogan "long march through the institutions" which became the raison d'être of the German Green party (which he, like that other charismatic anti-authoritarian Daniel Cohn-Bendit, went on to join). Today it is the thoroughly statist and reformist *Die Linke* (the leftist party in Germany) which identifies most strongly with his legacy. A more important figure theoretically was Hans Jürgen Krahl who also played a leading role in the SDS especially after Dutschke was shot. Krahl was a student of Adorno and brought many of the key concepts of Critical Theory into the movement, but he was also an activist — Adorno infamously had the cops called on him and his fellow students when they occupied one of the Institute's buildings — and maintained an orientation to the proletariat and the class struggle.[28] Although the Frankfurt School, in its turn to issues of psychoanalysis, culture and philosophy, had largely abandoned study of Marx's critique of political economy to the orthodox Marxists, it was Krahl and other students of Adorno — Hans George Backhaus, Helmult Reichelt — who initiated the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*.

Thus while for the communisation milieu it was a background in council communist and other left-communist critiques of Bolshevism that made them open to the radicality of the new Marx texts, in Germany — where such tendencies had been wiped out in the Nazi period[29]— a somewhat equivalent role was played by Adorno and the Frankfurt School. Both council communism and the Frankfurt School had developed as a reflection on the failure of the German Revolution of 1918-19. While council communism's relation to the German Revolution is the more direct, Sohn-Rethel, talking of the Frankfurt School and related thinkers Lukács and Bloch, captures their more complexly mediated relation to that period with a paradoxical formulation:

[T]he new development of thought which these people represent evolved as the theoretical and ideological superstructure of the revolution that never happened.[30]

Though detached from any working class milieu, the Frankfurt School had attempted to keep alive a critical and emancipatory Marxism against its development as an apologetic ideology for state-centred accumulation in Russia. The affinity with council communism is most clearly on display in earlier texts such as Horkheimer's *Authoritarian State,* which the anti-authoritarian students published to the disapproval

of the rather conservative later Horkheimer. Nonetheless a radical critique of capitalist society remains at the centre of Adorno's less obviously political texts of the fifties and sixties — indeed perhaps even precisely due to their avoidance of the logic of immediate political effectiveness. While the "ultra-left" had attempted to keep alive the emancipatory promise of Marxist theory against the actual developments of labour movements by emphasising working class autonomy against working class representation and institutions, the Frankfurt School had paradoxically attempted the same task by turning away from the immediate class struggle and "economic questions."

This meant that the radical re-appropriation of Marx in 1960s Germany necessarily took the form of both a continuation and a break from the legacy of the Frankfurt School. The intersection between a sensibility informed by the Frankfurt School, and a turn to the detailed study of the critique of political economy avoided by them, is expressed in an anecdote about Backhaus. According to Reichelt, the origins of the programme of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* may be traced to a moment in 1963 when Backhaus, while in student accommodation in Frankfurt, accidentally came across what was at that point a very rare first edition of *Capital*.[31] He noted that the differences from the second edition immediately leapt from the page, but that this was only possible because he had heard Adorno's lectures on the dialectical theory of society, for:

[H]ad not Adorno repeatedly put forward the idea of a "conceptual in reality itself", of a real universal which can be traced back to the abstraction of exchange, without his questions about the constitution of the categories and their inner relation in political economy, and without his conception of an objective structure that has become autonomous, this text would have remained silent — just as it had been throughout the (then!) already one hundred years of discussion of Marx's theory of value.[32]

Debates around the new reading of *Capital* really got going after 1968. The issues they brought to the fore, which were generally taken up only later and often less profoundly in discussions in other languages, concerned: the character of Marx's method and the validity of Engels' understanding of it; the relation between the dialectical development of categories in *Capital* and Hegelian dialectics; the significance of the unfinished aspects of Marx's plans for his critique; the importance of the term "critique" and the difference between Marx's theory of value and that of classical political economy; and the nature of abstraction in Marx's concept of abstract labour and in the critique of political economy generally.

Despite their often philological and abstract character, debates around the new reading of *Capital* were seen to have a political importance in the tension between the anti-authoritarian and the traditionalist pole of the student movement, with the latter maintaining that the framework of orthodox Marxism needed only to be modernized and adjusted.[33] The *Neue Marx-Lektüre* challenged this project of a renewed orthodoxy through arguing for nothing less than a fundamental reconstruction of the critique of political economy.[34]

At the time the dominant view of the method at work in *Capital* was some variant of the logico-historical one proposed by Engels in texts such as his 1859 review of Marx's *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, and his Preface and Supplement to *Capital* Volume III. On this view, the progression of the categories of *Capital* closely follows their actual historical development, such that the first few chapters of *Capital* are seen to describe a pre-capitalist period of "simple commodity production" when the "law of value" was said to operate in a pure way. In the German discussions, and

subsequently internationally, Engels' authority — as well as that of the traditional Marxism that depended on it — was comprehensively challenged.35 The *Neue Marx-Lektüre* argued that neither Engels' interpretation, nor any of the proposed modifications of it,36 did justice to the motion behind the order and development of the categories in *Capital*. Rather than an advance from a non-capitalist earlier stage, or hypothetical simplified model, of simple commodity production to a later stage, or more complex model, of capitalist commodity production, the movement in *Capital* was to be grasped as a presentation of the capitalist totality from the outset, moving from the abstract to the concrete. In *The Logical Structure of Marx's Concept of Capital*, Helmut Reichelt developed a conception which, in one form or other, is now basic to theorists of systematic dialectic: that the "logic of the concept of capital" as a self-determining process corresponds to the going-beyond-itself of the Concept in Hegel's*Logic*.37 According to this view the world of capital can be seen as objectively idealist: e.g. the commodity is a "sensous-supersensous thing".38 The dialectic of the value-form shows how, starting with the simplest commodity form, the material and concrete aspects of the social life process are dominated by the abstract and ideal social-forms of value. For Marx, as Reichelt puts it:

> Capital is thus conceived as a constant change of forms, into which use-value is constantly both integrated and expelled. In this process, use-value too, assumes the form of an eternally vanishing object. But this constantly renewed disappearance of the object is the condition for the perpetuation of the value itself — it is through the always reproduced change of forms that the immediate unity between value and use-value is retained. What is thus constituted is an inverted world in which sensuousness in the widest sense — as use-value, labour, exchange with nature — is demoted to a means of the self perpetuation of an abstract process that underlies the whole objective world of constant change. [...] The whole sensuous world of human beings who reproduce themselves through the satisfaction of needs and labour is step-by-step sucked into this process, in which all activities are "in themselves inverted". They are all, in their vanishing appearance, immediately their own opposite; the persistence of the general."39

This is the ontological inversion, the possession of material life by the spirit of capital. It is what Camatte grasped in his recognition of the importance of the understanding of capital as value in process and as subsumption. If there is no use-value other than in the form of value in capitalist society, if value and capital constitute a forceful, totalising form of socialisation that shapes every aspect of life, their overcoming is not a matter of the mere replacement of market mechanisms through a state manipulation or workers' self-management of these forms, but demands a radical transformation of every sphere of life. By contrast, the traditional Marxist conception derived from Engels — according to which the law of value pre-existed capitalism — separated the theory of the market and value from that of surplus value and exploitation and thus opened up the possibility of ideas of a socialist law of value, a socialist form of money, "market socialism" and so forth.

Part of the dogmatic nature of orthodox Marxism was to take the works of Marx to be a complete system to which only historical analyses of subsequent stages of capitalism such as imperialism had to be added. The discovery of the drafts and plans for the critique of political economy showed that*Capital* was incomplete, not just in the sense that volumes two and three, and *Theories of Surplus Value,*were left unfinished by

Marx and put together by Engels and Kautsky respectively,[40] but that these only constituted the first of a six book plan, alongside books on landed property, wage-labour, the state, foreign trade, and "The World Market and Crises."[41] The recognition that what exists of Marx's project is only a fragment was of tremendous importance, as this implied seeing Marxian theory as a radically open project, and developing areas of enquiry which were barely touched upon by Marx himself. The so-called state-derivation debate, and the debate on the world market, were attempts to develop some of those areas which Marx himself had not addressed systematically in *Capital*.[42]

Drawing on the pioneering work of Pashukanis, participants in the state-derivation debate grasped the separation of "the economic" and "the political" as something specific to capitalist domination. The implication was that — far from establishing a socialist economy and a workers' state, as in traditional Marxism — the revolution should be grasped as the destruction of both "the economy" and "the state". Despite the abstract — and at times scholastic — appearance of these debates, we thus begin to see how the critical return to Marx on the basis of the struggles of the late sixties in Germany had specific — and particularly radical — implications for how we conceive of the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production.

This is equally true for the core Marxian category of abstract labour as it is conceptualised in the German debates around value. Whereas in bourgeois social science, and in the dominant forms of Marxism, abstraction is a mental act, Marx argued that a different form of abstraction was present in capitalism: "real" or "practical abstraction" that people carry out in exchange without even knowing it. As Reichelt's anecdote about Backhaus indicates, it was Adorno's idea of an objective conceptuality to capitalist social life that inspired the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* approach to Marx's critique of political economy. This idea of Adorno's and his notion of 'identity thinking' had themselves been inspired by ideas that Sohn-Rethel had communicated to him in the thirties. The German discussion was thus advanced by the publication in 1970 of these ideas in Sohn-Rethel's book *Intellectual and Manual Labour*.[43] In this work Sohn-Rethel identifies the abstraction from use carried out in the exchange process as at the root not only of the strange kind of social synthesis in commodity societies, but of the very existence of abstract conceptual reasoning and the experience of the independent intellect. Sohn-Rethel's thesis is that the 'transcendental subject' as explicitly theorized by Kant is nothing else than a theoretical and at the same time blind expression of the unity or sameness of things constituted through exchange. Such ideas, along with those of Pashukanis on how the "legal subject" and commodity are co-produced historically, fed into a period of critical examination in which all aspects of life, including our very sense of inner subjectivity and consciousness, were grasped as form-determined by capital and value.

For Marx the most striking example of "real abstraction" is the money form of value, and perhaps the most far-reaching contribution of the German debates lies in their development of a "monetary theory of value" along the lines already laid out by Rubin. In an important passage from the 1st edition of*Capital* Marx describes money as an abstraction that perversely takes on a real-world existence independently of its particulars — "It is as if alongside and external to lions, tigers, rabbits, and all other actual animals … there existed also in addition *the animal*, the independent incarnation of the entire animal Kingdom."[44] The products of private labour must be exchanged with this concrete representation of abstract labour for their social validity to be realised

in actuality. Thus an abstraction — rather than a product of thought — exists in the world as an object with a social objectivity to which all must bow.

Traditional Marxism overlooked this discussion, and generally followed Ricardo and bourgeois economics in viewing money as simply a useful technical tool for facilitating the exchange of pre-existing commodity values. By contrast the German debates picked up on the strange kind of objectivity of value — that it does not inhere in any particular commodity, but only exists in the relation of equivalence between a commodity and the totality of other commodities — something that can only be brought about through money. This role of money in a generalised commodity society feeds back onto the experience of living labour itself. To the extent that labour is simply an activity carried out for money, the kind of labour performed is a matter of indifference and chance. The organic link that existed in previous societies between particular individuals and specific forms of labour is broken. A subject able to move indifferently between different forms of labour is developed:

Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category "labour", "labour as such", labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice. The simplest abstraction, then, which modern economics places at the head of its discussions, and which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society, nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.[45]

Abstract labour then as a *practical* abstraction is a fundamentally capitalist form of labour — a product of the reduction of all activities to abstract money-generating activity. In the traditional view, the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production need not involve the abolition of abstract labour: abstract labour, according to this view, is a *generic* abstraction, a general transhistorical truth underlying the appearance of market forms within the capitalist mode of production. This truth would shine forth in socialism, with the parasitic role of the capitalist eliminated, and the anarchic market organisation of social labour replaced by (state) planning. From a critical perspective, traditional Marxism had turned capitalist forms and laws into general laws of history: in the relatively backward areas such as Russia, where Marxism became the ideology of state-led industrial development, *Capital*became a "how-to manual." By contrast, for the value-form theorists Marx's theory of value, as a monetary theory of value, is "not a theory about the distribution of social wealth, but rather a theory of the constitution of the social totality under the conditions of capitalist commodity production."[46] The issue was thus shifted from one of distribution to an overcoming of the form of labour, of wealth and the mode of production itself.

In different countries, sometimes in knowledge of the German discussions but also independently, motivated by texts such as the *Grundrisse* and Rubin's *Essays*, similar questions were asked, and similar answers found. For example, the importance of the value-form was picked up by Althusser's then-follower Jacques Rancière. Althusser had correctly identified Marx as making a complete break with the theoretical field of Ricardo and classical political economy but was unable to identify the analysis of the value-form as key to this break, because he rejected it for its "Hegelianism." Rancière, however, noted that "what radically distinguishes Marx from classic economic theory is the analysis of the value-form of the commodity (or of the commodity form of the product of labour)."[47] This recognition was also taken up by another anti-Hegelian — Colletti[48]— and fed into an Italian debate on value initiated by himself and

Napoleoni,[49] which came to conclusions close to those of the value-form theorists. In the Anglophone discussions, where hardly anything from the German debates was translated until the late seventies, Rubin took on a primary importance.[50] In the *Conference of Socialist Economists,* a central forum for these debates, a major argument was that between a Rubin-inspired abstract social labour theory of value and a more traditionalist embodied labour theory of value. Those in the former camp moved in the direction of a monetary theory of value, as in the German debates, but there was far less discussion of and appreciation of the relevance of Hegel's *Logic* for understanding the systematic relation of the categories in *Capital*.[51] In the absence of a translation of Reichelt and Backhaus, the anglophone few who followed the Germans in wishing to reconstruct *Capital*[52] — the Konstanz-Sydney school, identified as a "value-form school" — were seen by most other participants as overly extreme. It is a feature of systematic dialectic as it has emerged recently that such suggestions of a need for a more radical reconstruction are now at the core of the discussion.

The critical import of value-form theory is that it calls into question any political conception based on the affirmation of the proletariat as producer of value. It recognises Marx's work as an essentially negative *critique* of capitalist society. In reconstructing the Marxian dialectic of the value-form, it demonstrates how the social life process is subsumed under — or "form-determined" by — the value-form. What characterises such "form-determination" is a perverse priority of the form over its content. Labour does not simply pre-exist its objectification in the capitalist commodity as a positive ground to be liberated in socialism or communism through the alteration of its formal expression. Rather, in a fundamental sense value — as the primary social mediation — pre-exists and thus has a priority over labour. As Chris Arthur argues:

At the deepest level, the failure of the tradition that uses the model of "simple commodity production", is that it focuses on the human individual as the originator of value relationships, rather than viewing human activities as objectively inscribed within the value form… In truth, however, the law of value is imposed on people through the effectivity of a system with capital at its heart, capital that subordinates commodity production is the aim of valorisation and it is the real subject (identified as such by Marx) confronting us.[53]

While it seems true and politically effective[54] to say that we produce capital by our labour, it is actually more accurate to say (in a world that really is topsy turvy) that we, as subjects of labour, are produced by capital. Socially necessary labour time is the measure of value *only because the value-form posits labour as its content*. In a society no longer dominated by alienated social forms — no longer orientated around the self-expansion of abstract wealth — the compulsion to labour which characterises the capitalist mode of production will disappear.[55] With value, abstract labour disappears as a category. The reproduction of individuals and their needs becomes an end in itself. Without the categories of value, abstract labour and the wage, "labour" would cease to have its systematic role as determined by the primary social mediation: value.

This is why value-form theory points, in terms of the notion of revolution that follows from it, in the same direction as communisation. The overcoming of capitalist social relations cannot involve a simple "liberation of labour"; rather, the only "way out" is the suppression of value itself — of the value-form which posits abstract labour as the measure of wealth. Communisation is the destruction of the commodity-form and the

simultaneous establishment of immediate social relations between individuals. Value, understood as a total form of social mediation, cannot be got rid of by halves.

The fact that few value-form theorists have explicitly drawn such radical political conclusions from their work is neither here nor there: such radical political (or anti-political) conclusions are for us the logical implications of the analysis.

Value-form theory's recognition of the "hidden kernel" of Marx's critique of political economy would suggest that already in 1867 Marx had grasped value as a totalising form of social mediation which had to be overcome as a whole. Thus Marxism, with its history of affirmation of labour and identification with state-led "socialist accumulation", could be seen as a history of the misinterpretation of Marx. The correct reading, which points towards a radical negation of value, has on this view somehow been missed. However, if Marx's theory of the value-form implied communisation in the modern sense then it was an implication that he clearly missed himself!

Indeed Marx's own attitude towards the importance of his value theory was ambivalent. On the one hand Marx insisted on its "scientific" importance, but in response to the difficulties his readers had in grasping its subtleties he seemed willing to compromise over it for the benefit of the reception of the rest of his work.56 As well as being willing to popularize his work and "hide his method," he allowed Engels (who as we have seen was one of the people who had difficulty with this aspect of his friend's work) to write various reviews which downplayed the treatment of value and money so it wouldn't "detract from the main topic." It seems Marx had the position that:

[T]he value theory is the logical prerequisite of his theory of capitalist production, but is not indispensable for understanding what this latter theory means, and especially, what the critique is of capitalist production. The Marxist discussion in recent years has adopted this apparent Marxian attitude (cf. also Marx's advice to Mrs. Kugelmann)57 in every way by setting up the problem of whether the Marxian value theory is necessary for the Marxian theory of class exploitation.58

Marx seemed to accept that a more or less left-Ricardian reading of his work would be adequate for the needs of the workers' movement. His political writings assumed that a powerful working class, rallying around an increasingly homogeneous workers' identity, would through its unions and its parties simply extend its day-to-day struggles into a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society. Against the Lassallian social democratic Marxism of his day, Marx did write the scathing *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in which he strongly attacked its labour-affirming and incoherent political economic assumptions. However he didn't feel it necessary to publish it. Moreover the ideas he put forward even in the *Critique* (which was later published by Engels) are by no means unproblematic. They include a theory of transition in which bourgeois right in distribution would still prevail, through the use of labour notes, and in which his description of the "first stage of socialism" is far closer to capitalism than it is to the more attractive second stage, with no mechanism given to explain how the one can change into the other.59

It would be wrong to suggest that the German discussion ignored the disjunction between the radical stance that many of them were deriving or developing from Marx's critique, and Marx's own politics. In the late seventies an important way in which this issue began to be understood was in terms of a difference between an "esoteric Marx" with a radical critique of value as a form of totalising social mediation, and an "exoteric Marx" with an orientation to, and support for, the aims of the workers' movement of his

time.60 The exoteric Marx was taken to be based on a misreading of the 19th century proletariat's radical potential. One strong tendency in the German context became to jettison the "exoteric Marx" in favour of the "esoteric Marx." Marx's idea of capital as an unconscious automatic subject was seen to displace the idea, which he also seems to have had, of the proletariat as the subject of history. Class struggle is not denied on this view, but seen as "system-immanent" — moving within the categories — and the abolition of the categories is looked for elsewhere. Marx on this view was simply wrong to identify with the workers' movement, which hindsight has shown us was a movement for emancipation within capitalist society, and not the movement to abolish that society. This tendency is exemplified by the "value-critique" groups *Krisis* and *Exit*. Though he does not use the esoteric/exoteric distinction, Moishe Postone, who developed his ideas in Frankfurt in the early seventies, essentially argues for the same kind of position. In *Time, Labor and Social Domination* he sees Marx as offering a "critique of labour in capitalism" (the esoteric Marx) rather than — as in traditional Marxism — a "critique from the point of view of labour" (the exoteric Marx). It is interesting that apart from this turn away from class, Postone is more explicit than most academic value-form Marxists in drawing conclusions from his theory which in political terms put him on the 'ultra-left' or even resonate with the communisation thesis.61

By no means all those influenced by the *New Marx Reading,* and certainly not all those within the broader area of a critical value-form oriented Marxism, take this turn away from the class struggle. In Anglophone discussions the adoption of a "monetary" or "abstract social labour" theory of value has in general not involved the same rejection of class analysis, but then it has also not involved the same critique of traditional leftist assumptions that emerged in Germany. Werner Bonefeld however, who has done more than most to introduce critical conceptions derived from the German discussions into Anglophone Marxism, does take a resolutely pro-class struggle perspective.62 Nonetheless, most accounts of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* understand one of its main characteristics to be a rejection of Marx's attribution of an historical mission to the proletariat, and a sensibility of scepticism towards the class struggle has been prevalent on the German left. But if in this type of view the proletariat is rejected as an agency of revolution then the question becomes of course — where will the abolition of class society come from? The somewhat unsatisfactory answer prevalent in various forms in German discussions seems to be that it is a matter of having the right critique — that is, in seeing the revolution as a matter of acquiring the correct consciousness. In this focus on correct consciousness and critique, it seems that ironically — for all the questioning of traditional Marxism — a certain Leninist problematic separating educator and educated is retained.

We have emphasised the way in which the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* marked a development from and improvement on the Frankfurt School. Adorno's dialectical theory of society — in terms of its systemic self-reproduction behind the backs of individuals, of the inversion of subject-object, and the existence of real abstraction — was derived from Marx's critique of political economy. However Adorno did not himself conduct a detailed study of *Capital* and its drafts, relying to a great extent on others' research.63 The *Neue Marx-Lektüre* demonstrated the correctness of Adorno's understanding of capitalist society, not in the general area of philosophy and social theory, but on traditional Marxism's chosen terrain of the interpretation of *Capital*. Yet Adorno and Horkheimer seemed unable to follow the theoretical developments being

made by their students.64 After their death the legacy of the Frankfurt School suffered a complete degeneration into bourgeois theory under Habermas, while the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* fed into a flourishing of critical Marxian theory.

Nonetheless there is a way in which the achievements of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* can be seen to fall beneath Adorno. The category of class plays little role in the writings of Backhaus and Reichelt and they treat the question of revolution as outside their field of academic expertise, and thus it is ironically Adorno, even with his idea of the integration of the proletariat, who has more to say on these subjects. Antagonism as a concept features prominently in his writings and is meant in a very orthodox sense of class antagonism. In essays such as *Society* (1965), *Remarks on social conflict today* (1968) and *Late capitalism or industrial society?* (1968) Adorno reveals an "orthodox" (in a good sense) concern for the reality of class antagonism and exploitation. In "Remarks", written with Ursula Jaerisch, he attacks the notion of social conflict as a "positivistic" flattening of Marx's concept of class struggle, though one objectively made possible by the development of class society (integration). Though not being fought out consciously, class antagonism is still at the very heart of contemporary society according to Adorno. This is brought out in the notes to a lecture by Adorno that Backhaus acknowledges as inspiring the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*. Adorno repeatedly stresses here that the "exchange relation is pre-formed (*präformiert*) by the class relation"; the only reason why the worker accepts given relations is that he has "nothing but his labour-power" to sell. Unlike Backhaus' own writings, Adorno's focus is very much on the fact that while exchange is no mere illusion, "it is in the concept of surplus value that the semblance (*Schein*) of the process of exchange is to be found."65 Thus while Backhaus and Reichelt delved much deeper into Marx's writings, in a certain sense Adorno was less "academic", more "political", and closer to Marx's concern with exploitation and class antagonism.

In this respect too, Krahl was totally different to his inheritors. As the full title of his posthumously published writings66 indicates, Krahl had the merit not only of being interested in the mediation of the value categories and class struggle but also of taking an eminently historical perspective, one which is largely missing from the essentially philological works of Reichelt and Backhaus. After Krahl a concern for systemic reconstruction displaces all concern for history in the *Neue Marx-Lektüre*. The move of Backhaus, Reichelt and the next generation of value theorists like Heinrich has been to expel from Marx's work everything that smells of an 'unscientific' philosophy of history or theory of revolution. The issue is not to seek out some kind of mechanical application of the theory but to recognize that the problems that Adorno and Krahl gave different answers to have not gone away. System must be grasped historically and history systematically.

As opposed to any simplistic return to the position of Adorno (or for that matter the untranslated writings of Krahl), the point is to grasp Adorno's pessimistic attitude to the possibilities of class struggle of his day as an attempt at an honest facing up to the contradictions and impasses of his period, rather than a mere failing on his part. Similarly the retreat from the questions of Krahl, the scepticism in German discussions about "class struggle Marxism", and the attempt to ground a revolutionary theory in some other way are not mere ideological aberrations. If they have not seemed to arrive at a convincing alternative they have at least identified a real problem. It is not obvious from the historical record that the workers' movement points in the direction of

communism understood as the end of value, class, the state etc. — indeed quite the reverse. The argument that class struggle is system-immanent captures the "trapped" character of struggles within capital. The idea of the esoteric and exoteric Marx — the wish to decouple Marxian critique from the class struggle — appears, no matter how heretical, to offer a plausible solution to the problem of the failure of the working class to perform its "historic task": through the idea that the workers' movement was *never* really revolutionary in itself, and that the really revolutionary perspective lay simply in Marx's "esoteric" vision. Yet of course such a decoupling would leave us with no plausible alternative scenario for the realisation of this vision.

It is clear that the theory of value and class-analysis cannot ultimately be separated. The categories of value and class are mutually implicated. By understanding capital as operating in terms of a "systematic dialectic"[67] one can see that their relation is an internal one, both that "the positing of social labour in the form of the contradiction of capital and wage labour — is the ultimate development of the value-relation"[68] and that value relations are a product of the separation of living labour from objectified labour, that is of class. But although it must therefore be ultimately futile to look for the abolition of value anywhere else than in the class that is forced to produce it, and which is increasingly made redundant by it, the doubts about the revolutionary potential of the working class that are harboured by many of the value-critics have to be confronted. It seems to us that *Théorie Communiste* do this.

At the heart of *TC*'s theory is the recognition of the reciprocal implication or mutual involvement of proletariat and capital. The fundamental question that this poses is that of how the struggle of a class that is a class of capitalist society can abolish that society. Part of the importance of the contribution of *TC* is to have resisted answering this by attributing a revolutionary human essence to the proletariat, beneath its merely class and capitalist nature, while at the same time not losing the centrality of the class contradiction. Their answer is rather to grasp the class relation as developing historically through cycles of struggle, while always involving a systematic implication. Crucially for *TC* "communisation" is not what communism and the revolution "always really was or as it always should have been."[69] Rather, the concept of communisation emerges historically with the end of a cycle of struggle in which communism and revolution appeared as something else.

For *TC*, the classical workers' movement from Marx through the 2nd and 3rd Internationals was part of a cycle of struggle which they term programmatism.[70] In this period workers' struggles and the vision of the overcoming of capitalism that emerged from them was based on an autonomy and positivity that workers were able to maintain within the capital-labour relation. The revolution of this period could be described as the impossible attempt to abolish a relation by affirming one of its poles. The tragedies of social democracy and Stalinism, and anarchism's experience in Spain, were the product of the contradictions of the goal and methods set by the movement in its high period, which in turn were a product of the configuration of the class relation at that time — i.e. of the way that capital and class confronted each other. François Danel sums up the situation in the following passage:

Since the development of the capitalist relation — that is to say of the struggle of its classes — did not immediately bring the abolition but the generalisation of wage-labour, the proletariat abstracted the final goal from the movement and made the revolution — its seizure of power — depend on the maturation of conditions both objective (the

development of the productive forces) and subjective (its will and its class consciousness). It thus posed communism as a programme and its full achievement as the ultimate term of an impossible *transition*: the proletarian repossession and mastery of the movement of value, wage-labour supposedly "withering away" from the moment that one replaced money with the labour note. [...] What the workers' movement thus called into question was not capital as mode of production, but only the management of production by the bourgeoisie. It was either a question of workers seizing the productive apparatus from this parasitic class and of destroying its State in order to rebuild another, led by the party as the bearer of consciousness, or else of undermining the power of the bourgeois State by organising production themselves from the bottom up, through the organ of the trade unions or councils. But there was never a question or an attempt of abolishing the law of value — the compulsion towards accumulation and thus towards the reproduction of exploitation which materialises itself at the same time in machinery, in fixed capital as capital in itself, and in the necessary existence, facing the working class, of an exploiting class, bourgeois or bureaucratic, as the collective agent of that reproduction.[71]

The determinate failure of this programmatic revolution bequeathed a post-WW2 capitalism where the workers' movement had a certain power within capitalist society but no longer carried its earlier aspect of autonomous revolutionary affirmation. It was this situation that the development of a revolutionary theory had to confront. The struggles which then gave rise to new theoretical production in the 60s and 70s were — whatever the hopes of groups like the SI — not beyond programmatism. Rather, they took on a contradictory character: counter-cultural utopianism and "resistance to work," issues of everyday life, coinciding with — and in many ways depending upon — the strength of a more programmatic movement. It was in this contradiction and these struggles that the theory of communisation and the new critical Marxism could arise. The resolution of these struggles in capital's favour marked the end of that cycle in a restructuring in which the class's possibilities of a positive autonomy and affirmation within capitalism would be suppressed. It is for *TC* exactly this defeat that creates a new configuration of the class relation in which the existence of the class is no longer experienced as a positivity to affirm but as an external constraint in the form of capital. And it is this configuration which necessitates both a new understanding of communism and a new reading of Marx.

It is possible to interpret this "return to Marx" in terms of an ebb and flow of communist theory to parallel that of revolutionary waves: 1917, 1968 etc. But, just as the perspective of communisation did not emerge even in the marginal heretical tendencies of the earlier revolutionary period, neither did earlier critical Marxisms go as far as those that emerged from the sixties. Lukács, Rubin and Pashukanis developed their conceptions in relation to an ascendant workers' movement expressing a certain configuration of the capital-labour relation. The work of the earlier critical Marxists, as well as that of Marx — the first value-form theorist — had contradictions and limitations which the later generation, writing as programmatism was coming to an end, were able to go beyond.[72] In the earlier period, while the affirmative proletarian project of programmatism was necessarily a failure not only from our perspective of communisation, but even — and this is important — in terms of the goals it set itself, it nevertheless gave the contradiction of capital and labour "room to move." By the late sixties that room was being exhausted. For the theorists of the "second revolutionary

wave" of the 20th century, one issue that was plainly at stake was a rejection of the idea and practice of socialism as that of workers receiving the true value of their labour in a planned economy.

The critical reading of Marx grasps the radicality of what the revolutionary negation of value involves: we are speaking as much of the overcoming of our own selves as of something "out there." The contribution of *TC* is to grasp how and why the configuration of the contradiction between capital and labour in an earlier period did not pose such an overcoming. In Marx's day, and during the historical workers' movement, the relation of capital and proletariat posed revolution in terms of the affirmation rather than the negation of labour, value and class. The work of *TC* suggests that the radical "way out" implied by value-form theory may be determined by the historical evolution of the capital-labour relation itself, rather than being the product of an ahistorically correct consciousness, free-floating scientific point of view or perspective of critique. The historical perspective on the class relation complements value-form theory. And the sophisticated analysis of capitalist social relations in systematic dialectic and value-form theory can inform the perspective of communisation by offering an elaboration of what exactly this class relation *is,* and how the particular social relations of capitalist society are form-determined as such. Systematic dialectic and value-form theory can help us to understand the character of the capitalist class relation, i.e. what it is exactly that can have a history in which revolution previously presented itself in the form of programmatism, and whose adequate horizon of supersession is now communisation. Communism necessitates the abolition of a multifaceted relation that has evolved over time, but to abolish it simply means that we cease to constitute value, and it ceases to constitute us. The radicality of our own period is that this is now the only way we can conceive it.

1. We are indebted to German comrades for their helpful comments in drafting this article, particularly DD and Felix from *Kosmoprolet*.
2. Marx, *Capital*, vol.1 (*MECW* 35), pp.91-2 n. 2 (Fowkes translation).
3. A by no means exhaustive list of authors here would include Chris Arthur, Werner Bonefeld, Hans George Backhaus, Riccardo Bellofiore, Michael Eldred, Michael Heinrich, Hans Jürgen Krahl, Patrick Murray, Moishe Postone, Helmult Reichelt, Geert Reuten, Ali Shamsavari, Felton Shortall, Tony Smith, Michael Williams.
4. Marx, *Capital*, vol.1 (*MECW* 35), pp.91-2 (translation amended).
5. At the same time, Marx himself seemed to recognise that there was a problem with his analysis of the value-form, which led him to make at least four versions of the argument. There are notable differences between the development of value in the *Grundrisse*, *Urtext,* the *Contribution*, the first edition of *Capital* with its appendix, and the second edition of *Capital*; and the later versions can by no means be assumed to be improvements in every way on those that went before. Indeed the somewhat more popularising later presentations – which Marx developed in response to the difficulty which even those close to him had in understanding him – lose some of the dialectical subtleties, and lend themselves more towards the left-Ricardian reading of Marx's argument which would dominate the workers' movement. See Hans-Georg Backhaus, 'On the Dialectics of the Value-Form' *Thesis*

Eleven 1 (1980); Helmut Reichelt, 'Why Marx Hid his Dialectical Method' in Werner Bonefeld et al., eds., *Open Marxism vol. 3* (Pluto Press 1995).

6. Isaak Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Black & Red 1972), p. 5.
7. Ibid., p.117. Riccardo Bellofiore has pointed out that Rosa Luxemburg was another exception among traditional Marxists in paying close attention to the value-form. See his introduction to *Rosa Luxemburg and the Critique of Political Economy* (Routledge 2009), p.6.
8. Orthodoxy has come to mean dogmatic Marxism. Lukács made an interesting attempt to redeem the sense of orthodoxy by saying it referred exclusively to method. Perhaps out of this ambiguity of what 'orthodoxy' can mean, the terms 'worldview' Marxism and 'traditional Marxism' have been used by critical Marxists to refer to the received interpretations of Marx they wish to overthrow. Here we will use orthodox and traditional Marxism interchangeably.
9. Marx, *Grundrisse*, (*MECW* 28), p.413 (Nicolaus translation).
10. Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community: the Results of the Immediate Process of Production and the Economic Works of Marx* (Unpopular Books 1998). Originally published in *Invariance* Series I no. 2 (1968).
11. Roman Rosldolsky, *The Making of Marx's Capital* (Pluto Press 1977). German original published in 1968.
12. Camatte nonetheless criticizes Rosdolsky for 'not getting to the point of stating what we believe is fundamental: capital is value in process, becoming man.' Jacques Camatte, *Capital and Community*(Unpopular Books 1998) p. 163.
13. This is a way of reading the *Grundrisse* that later becomes identified with Negri. Indeed it has been argued that the early work of the latter owes something to Camatte. Strikingly whatever the ambivalences of autonomist politics, the chapter 'Communism and Transition' in Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx* (1978) essentially makes an argument for communisation.
14. Commenting on his earlier idea of a 'formal domination of communism' Camatte writes: 'the periodisation loses its validity today; also the rapidity of the realization of communism will be greater than was previously thought. Finally we must specify that communism is neither a mode of production, nor a society…' Ibid., p.148, n.19.
15. Ibid., p. 165.
16. Gilles Dauvé 'Sur L'Ultragauche' (1969), first published in English as 'Leninism and the Ultraleft' in: Jean Barrot (Gilles Dauvé) and François Martin, *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement* (Black and Red, 1974), p. 104.
17. 'For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. Then wealth is no longer measured by labour time but by disposable time.' Marx, *Grundrisse* (*MECW* 29), p. 94. It is interesting that Moishe Postone who has been explicit about the radical political implications of a 'value-form' approach makes these passages basic to his reinterpretation of Marx. see: *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (Cambridge University Press 1993).

18. Gilles Dauvé, *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement* (Black and Red, 1974), p. 61.
19. Marx, *Grundrisse* (*MECW* 28), pp. 221-2
20. And from nature, which for capital is – like human beings – purely a resource for the expansion of abstract wealth.
21. Yet *TC*'s claim is not that communisation was Marx's concept of the revolution – see the discussion of 'programmatism' below.
22. Marx, *Grundrisse* (*MECW* 29), p. 210.
23. For an interpretation of 'traditional Marxism' as 'worldview Marxism' see Michael Heinrich, 'Invaders from Marx: On the Uses of Marxian Theory, and the Difficulties of a Contemporary Reading', *Left Curve* 31 (2007) pp. 83–8. This way of characterising 'traditional Marxism' seems to originate with the humanist Marxist Iring Fetscher, under whom both Reichelt and Postone studied. See his *Marx and Marxism* (Herder and Herder 1971).
24. Works that stand out from that period are Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy*, Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* and Pashukanis' *Law and Marxism*. One of the features of the new period was a rediscovery of many of the texts of this earlier period, and a deepening of their problematics.
25. A significant example of this is that, as Chris Arthur notes, nearly all references to 'embodied' labour in*Capital* are translations of the German term *Darstellung* which could more properly be translated as 'represented'. See 'Reply to Critics' *Historical Materialism* 13.2 (2005) p.217
26. This included an interest in Freud and Reich combined with Adorno's scathing attacks on the revisionism of contemporary psychoanalysis; Marcuse's *Eros and Civilisation* and *One-Dimensional Man*; and the School's analysis of the 'authoritarian personality.'
27. Rudi Dutschke, 'Zur Literatur des revolutionären Sozialismus von K. Marx bis in die Gegenwart' *SDS-korrespondenz* sondernummer 1966.
28. Krahl died in a car crash in 1970. The posthumously published collection of his writings and talks –*Konstitution und Klassenkampf* – has not been translated into English.
29. A significant exception was Willy Huhn, who influenced some members of the Berlin SDS. A member of the '*Rote Kämpfer*', a late 1920s regrouping of KAPD members, Huhn was briefly imprisoned by the Nazis in 1933/34 after which he turned to theoretical work including an important critique of Social democracy: *Der Etatismus der Sozialdemokratie: Zur Vorgeschichte des Nazifaschismus*. Nonetheless it was only after the peak of the movement that the council communists were properly rediscovered and published.
30. He adds: 'The paradoxical condition of this ideological movement may help to explain its almost exclusive preoccupation with superstructural questions, and the conspicuous lack of concern for the material and economic base that should have been underlying it.' Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour*(Humanities Press 1978), p. xii. C.f. the first line of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*: 'Philosophy, which once seemed

obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.' Theodore Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Continuum 1983), p.3.

31. The first German edition of *Capital* had major differences– especially in the structure and development of the first chapter on the commodity and value – from the second edition, which was the basis of the little altered subsequent editions and translations into other languages.
32. Helmut Reichelt, *Neue Marx-Lektüre: Zur Kritik sozialwissenschaftlicher Logik* (VSA-Verlag, 2008) p.11.
33. While the traditional Marxist pole of the SDS up to 1968 had been essentially reformist, advocating a legal transition to socialism, that which came to the fore after 1968 was anti-revisionist Maoist-Stalinism. This was the period when many earlier 'anti-authoritarians' lost their critique of party-Marxism and engaged in the formation of the 'K-Groups' ('K' standing for Kommunist).
34. See Michael Heinrich, 'Reconstruction or Deconstruction? Methodological Controversies about Value and Capital, and New Insights from the Critical Edition' in Riccardo Bellofiore and Roberto Fineschi, eds., *Re-Reading Marx: New Perspectives after the Critical Edition* (Palgrave Macmillan 2009).
35. See 'The Moving Contradiction' below.
36. Grossman, for example, offered the idea of successive approximation in which *Capital* was seen to present a series of analytical models becoming more complex as further aspects of reality were added.
37. Helmut Reichelt, *Zur logischen Struktur des Kapitalbegriffs bei Karl Marx* (Suhrkamp Verlag 1970). How close this correspondence is to be drawn is a subject of much debate. See the debates between Chris Arthur, Tony Smith and Robert Finelli in *Historical Materialism* (issues 11.1, 15.2 and 17.1). In Germany Michael Heinrich and Dieter Wolff would criticise in quite differing ways the idea of a 'homology' of capital and spirit.
38. This is Bonefeld's more accurate translation of '*sinnlich übersinnlich*' poorly translated in English editions of*Capital*. See his translator's note to: Helmult Reichelt, 'Social Reality as Appearance: Some Notes on Marx's Conception of Reality', in: Werner Bonefeld, and Kosmas Psychopedis, eds., *Human Dignity. Social Autonomy And The Critique Of Capitalism* (Hart Publishing 2005), p. 31.
39. Ibid., p. 46-47.
40. When Moscow republished *Theories of Surplus Value* they were able to question Kautsky's editorial decisions, something they would never consider for the considerable changes done by Engels to volume III. Publication of the original Manuscripts (in German) reveals that Engels' work involved major rewriting and questionable editorial decisions, but such questioning of the core corpus of Marxism was anathema to traditional Marxism. See Michael Heinrich: 'Engels' Edition of the Third Volume of Capital and Marx's Original Manuscript', in:*Science & Society*, vol. 60, no. 4, 1996, pp. 452-466
41. Rosdolsky contentiously argues that the second and third books are incorporated into a changed plan for*Capital*, but even if one were to agree

with him rather than the counter-arguments of Lebowitz and Shortall, the remaining three books clearly are unfinished business.

42. For the state derivation debate see: John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, eds,. *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate* (University of Texas Press 1978) and Karl Held and Audrey Hill, *The Democratic State: Critique of Bourgeois Sovereignty* (Gegenstandpunkt, 1993). Very little of the debate on the world market has been translated, but see: Oliver Nachtwey and Tobias ten Brink, 'Lost in Transition: the German World-Market Debate in the 1970s,' Historical Materialism 16.1 (2008), pp. 37-70.
43. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit. Zur Theorie gesellschaftlicher Synthesis* (Suhrkamp 1970). English translation: *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (Humanities Press 1978).
44. Marx, 'The Commodity, Chapter One, Volume One of the first edition of Capital' in *Value: Studies by Karl Marx*, trans. A. Dragstedt (New Park 1976), p. 27.
45. Marx, *Grundrisse* (*MECW* 28), p. 41 (Nicolaus trans.).
46. Michael Heinrich, 'Invaders from Marx: On the Uses of Marxian Theory, and the Difficulties of a Contemporary Reading', *Left Curve* 31 (2007)
47. Jacques Rancière, 'Le Concept de Critique et la Critique de l'Économie Politique des Manuscrits de 1844 au Capital', in Althusser et al, *Lire le Capital* (RUF 1996), p. 128. English translation: 'The concept of 'critique' and the 'critique of political economy' ' in *Ideology, Method and Marx*, edited by Ali Rattansi. p 114
48. Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel* (Verso 1979), p 281.
49. See Riccardo Bellofiore, 'The Value of Labour Value: the Italian Debate on Marx, 1968-1976' in the special English edition of *Rivista di Politica Economica* IV-4-5V (April-May 1999).
50. Yet, surprisingly, the importance of Rubin was underestimated in the German debates. The *Essays* were only translated into German (from the English) in 1973, and they left out the first chapter on fetishism. See DD, 'Sachliche Vermittlung und soziale Form. I.I. Rubins Rekonstruktion der marxschen Theorie des Warenfetischismus' in the forthcoming *Kritik der politischen Philosophie Eigentum*, Gesellsschaftsvertrag, Staat II
51. A notable exception was the pioneering essay by Jairus Banaji: 'From the Commodity to Capital: Hegel's Dialectic in Marx's Capital,' in Diane Elson, ed., *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism* (CSE Books 1979).
52. e.g.: Michael Eldred, *Critique of Competitive Freedom and the Bourgeois-Democratic State: Outline of a Form-Analytic Extension of Marx's Uncompleted System* (Kurasje 1984).
53. Chris Arthur, 'Engels, Logic and History' in Riccardo Bellofiori, ed., *Marxian Economics a Reappraisal: Essays on Volume III of Capital, vol. 1* (Macmillan 1998), p. 14.
54. Mike Rooke for example criticises Chris Arthur and the systematic dialectic approach for 'reifying the dialectic' and losing its meaning as a

'dialectic of labour'. 'Marxism, Value and the Dialectic of Labour,'*Critique* Vol. 37, No. 2, May 2009, pp. 201-216.

55. Outside of class society 'labour' – the human need to interchange with nature ('man's inorganic body… with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die' [EPM]) is not an external compulsion but an expression of one's own nature. Determination by oneself in the sense, for example, of having to do things to eat, is not compulsion.
56. For a discussion (drawing on Backhaus) see Michael Eldred, Preface to *Critique of Competitive Freedom and the Bourgeois-Democratic State* (Kurasje 1984), xlv-li.
57. Marx advised that his friend's wife could, because of its difficulty, skip the first part of *Capital* (on value and money) – Eldred refers here to the fact that many readers of Marx such as those persuaded by Sraffa and Althusser think that this is the right way to approach Marx.
58. Michael Eldred, Ibid. pp. xlix-l.
59. See R.N. Berki, *Insight and Vision: The Problem of Communism in Marx's Thought* (JM Dent 1984) chapter 5.
60. Though it may well derive from Backhaus, according to van der Linden the distinction was coined by Stefan Breuer in 'Krise der Revolutionstheorie' (1977). Marcel van der Linden, 'The Historical Limit of Workers' Protest: Moishe Postone, Krisis and the "Commodity Logic",' *Review of Social History*, vol. 42 no. 3 (December 1997), pp. 447-458.
61. Like Dauvé, Postone takes the 'Fragment on Machines' to undermine traditional Marxist conceptions of socialism; he sees traditional Marxism as a Ricardian Marxism which sought the self-realisation of the proletariat rather than – as in Marx – its self-abolition, he grasps the *USSR* as having been capitalist, and like*TC* he emphasises the historical constitution of both objectivity and subjectivity. However when it comes to practical positions in the present he orientates towards reforms, stating significantly that his analysis 'does not mean that I am an ultra.' Moishe Postone and Timothy Brennan, 'Labor and the Logic of Abstraction: an interview' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 108:2 (2009) p. 319.
62. See e.g. Werner Bonefeld, 'On Postone's Courageous but Unsuccessful Attempt to Banish the Class Antagonism' *Historical Materialism* 12.3 (2004).
63. As well as the work of Lukács and Sohn-Rethel, Adorno was indebted to Alfred Schmidt for all the Grundrisse quotes that he uses in Negative Dialectics. See Michael Eldred and Mike Roth, Translators Introduction to 'Dialectics of the Value-Form' in *Thesis Eleven* no. 1 (1980) p. 96.
64. See Helmut Reichelt 'From the Frankfurt School to Value-Form Analysis' *Thesis Eleven* no. 4 (1982) p. 166.
65. Backhaus' notes from a 1962 lecture by Adorno are included as an Appendix to *Dialektik der Wertform* (ca ira 1997).
66. *Constitution and Class Struggle: On the historical dialectic of bourgeois revolution and proletarian emancipation* (Verlag Neue Kritik 2008).
67. See 'The Moving Contradiction' below.

68. Marx, *Grundrisse*, (*MECW* 29), p.90 (Nicolaus translation).
69. Théorie Communiste, 'Much Ado About Nothing' *Endnotes* no.1 (2008), p. 192.
70. This is the major concept at stake in the debate between Dauvé and *TC* in *Endnotes* no.1.
71. François Danel, Introduction to *Rupture dans la théorie de la revolution: Textes 1965-1975* (Senonevero 2003)
72. For example, despite the way Rubin prefigures or directly inspires much later value-form theory, some of his categories such as a trans-historical category of 'physiologically equal labour' and that of 'socially equated labour' as the basis of socialism can be seen as an expression of the way revolution was posed in the period and the situation of state planner he found himself in. If most present day value-form theorists do not explicitly repudiate a programmatic conception of revolution, there is nonetheless a much bigger move away from the affirmation of labour than in the earlier critical Marxism. The 'revolutionary' implications of value-form theory are only drawn out when the development of the class struggle – that is of capitalism – allows this.

Anarchist FAQ
"Synthesis Federations; Platforms; Why Anarchists oppose platforms"
http://www.infoshop.org/page/AnarchistFAQSectionJ3

The "synthesis" federation acquired its name from the work of Voline (a Russian exile) and leading French anarchist Sebastien Faure in the 1920s. Voline published in 1924 a paper calling for *"the anarchist synthesis"* and was also the author of the article in Faure's **Encyclopedie Anarchiste** on the very same topic. Its roots lie in the Russian revolution and the **Nabat** federation created in the Ukraine during 1918 whose aim was *"organising all of the life forces of anarchism; bringing together through a common endeavour all anarchists seriously desiring of playing an active part in the social revolution which is defined as a process (of greater or lesser duration) giving rise to a new form of social existence for the organised masses."* [**No Gods, No Masters**, vol. 2, p. 117]

The "synthesis" organisation is based on uniting all kinds of anarchists in one federation as there is, to use the words of the **Nabat**, *"validity in all anarchist schools of thought. We must consider all diverse tendencies and accept them."* The synthesis organisation attempts to get different kinds of anarchists *"joined together on a number of basic positions and with the awareness of the need for planned, organised collective effort on the basis of federation."* [quoted in *"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, pp. 32-6, **Constructive Anarchism**, G. P. Maximoff (ed.), p. 32] These basic positions would be based on a synthesis of the viewpoints of the members of the organisation, but each tendency would be free to agree their own ideas due to the federal nature of the organisation.

An example of this synthesis approach is provided by the differing assertions that anarchism is a theory of classes (as stated by the Platform, among others), that

anarchism is a humanitarian ideal for all people and that anarchism is purely about individuals (and so essentially individualist and having nothing to do with humanity or with a class). The synthesis of these positions would be to *"state that anarchism contains class elements as well as humanism and individualist principles . . . Its class element is above all its means of fighting for liberation; its humanitarian character is its ethical aspect, the foundation of society; its individualism is the goal of humanity."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32]

So, as can be seen, the "synthesis" tendency aims to unite all anarchists (be they individualist, mutualist, syndicalist or communist) into one common federation. Thus the "synthesis" viewpoint is "inclusive" and obviously has affinities with the *"anarchism without adjectives"* approach favoured by many anarchists (see section A.3.8). However, in practice many "synthesis" organisations are more restrictive (for example, they could aim to unite all**social** anarchists) and so there can be a difference between the general idea of the synthesis and how it is concretely applied.

The basic idea behind the synthesis is that the anarchist movement (in most countries, at most times, including France in the 1920s and Russia during the revolution and at this time) is divided into three main tendencies: communist anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism, and individualist anarchism. This division can cause severe damage to the movement simply because of the many (and often redundant) arguments and diatribes on why "my anarchism is best" can get in the way of working in common in order to fight our common enemies (state, capitalism and authority). The "synthesis" federations are defined by agreeing what is the common denominator of the various tendencies within anarchism and agreeing a minimum programme based on this for the federation. This would allow a *"certain ideological and tactical unity among organisations"* within the "synthesis" federation. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35] Moreover, as well as saving time and energy for more important tasks, there are technical and efficiency reasons for unifying into one organisation, namely allowing the movement to have access to more resources and being able to co-ordinate them so as to maximise their use and impact.

The "synthesis" federation, like all anarchist groups, aims to spread anarchist ideas within society as a whole. They believe that their role is to *"assist the masses only when they need such assistance . . . the anarchists are part of the membership in the economic and social mass organisations [such as trade unions]. They act and build as part of the whole. An immense field of action is opened to them for ideological [sic!], social and creative activity without assuming a position of superiority over the masses. Above all they must fulfil their ideological and ethical influence in a free and natural manner . . . [they] offer ideological assistance, but not in the role of leaders."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33] This, as we shall see in section J.3.6, is the common anarchist position as regards the role of an anarchist group.

The great strength of "synthesis" federations, obviously, is that they allow a wide and diverse range of viewpoints to be expressed within the organisation which can allow the development of political ideas and theories by constant discussion and debate. They allow the maximum amount of resources to be made available to individuals and groups within the organisation by increasing the number of members. This is why we find the original promoters of the "synthesis" arguing that *"that first step toward achieving unity in the anarchist movement which can lead to serious organisation is collective ideological work on a series of important problems that seek the clearest possible collective solution,"* discussing *"concrete questions"* rather than *"philosophical*

problems and abstract dissertations" and *"suggest that there be a publication for discussion in every country where the problems in our ideology [sic!] and tactics can be fully discussed, regardless of how 'acute' or even 'taboo' it may be. The need for such a printed organ, as well as oral discussion, seems to us to be a 'must' because it is the practical way to try to achieve 'ideological unity', 'tactical unity', and possibly organisation . . . A full and tolerant discussion of our problems . . . will create a basis for understanding, not only among anarchists, but among different conceptions of anarchism."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 35]

The "synthesis" idea for anarchist organisation was taken up by those who opposed the Platform (see next section). For both Faure and Voline, the basic idea was the same, namely that the various tendencies in anarchism must co-operate and work in the same organisation. However, there are differences between Voline's and Faure's points of view. The latter saw these various tendencies as a wealth in themselves and advocated that each tendency would gain from working together in a common organisation. From Voline's point of view, the emergence of these various tendencies was historically needed to discover the in-depth implications of anarchism in various settings (such as the economical, the social and individual life). However, it was the time to go back to anarchism as a whole, an anarchism considerably empowered by what each tendency could give it, and in which tendencies as such should dissolve. Moreover, these tendencies co-existed in every anarchist at various levels, so all anarchists should aggregate in an organisation where these tendencies would disappear (both individually and organisationally, i.e. there would not be an "anarcho-syndicalist" specific tendency inside the organisation, and so forth).

The "synthesis" federation would be based on complete autonomy (within the basic principles of the Federation and Congress decisions, of course) for groups and individuals, so allowing all the different trends to work together and express their differences in a common front. The various groups would be organised in a federal structure, combining to share resources in the struggle against state, capitalism and other forms of oppression. This federal structure is organised at the local level through a "local union" (i.e. the groups in a town or city), at the regional level (i.e. all groups in, say, Strathclyde are members of the same regional union) up to the "national" level (i.e. all groups in Scotland, say) and beyond.

As every group in the federation is autonomous, it can discuss, plan and initiate an action (such as campaign for a reform, against a social evil, and so on) without having to wait for others in the federation (or have to wait for instructions). This means that the local groups can respond quickly to issues and developments. This does not mean that each group works in isolation. These initiatives may gain federal support if local groups see the need. The federation can adopt an issue if it is raised at a federal conference and other groups agree to co-operate on that issue. Moreover, each group has the freedom **not** to participate on a specific issue while leaving others to do so. Thus groups can concentrate on what they are interested in most.

The programme and policies of the federation would be agreed at regular delegate meetings and congresses. The "synthesis" federation is managed at the federal level by "relations committees" made up of people elected and mandated at the federation congresses. These committees would have a purely administrative role, spreading information, suggestions and proposals coming from groups and individuals within the organisation, looking after the finances of the federation and so on. They do not have

any more rights than any other member of the federation (i.e. they could not make a proposal as a committee, just as members of their local group or as individuals). These administrative committees are accountable to the federation and subject to both mandates and recall.

Most national sections of the **International Anarchist Federation** (IFA) are good examples of successful federations which are heavily influenced by "synthesis" ideas (such as the French and Italian federations). Obviously, though, how effective a "synthesis" federation is depends upon how tolerant members are of each other and how seriously they take their responsibilities towards their federations and the agreements they make.

Of course, there are problems with most forms of organisation, and the "synthesis" federation is no exception. While diversity can strengthen an organisation by provoking debate, a too diverse grouping can often make it difficult to get things done. Platformist and other critics of the "synthesis" federation argue that it can be turned into a talking shop and any common programme difficult to agree, never mind apply. For example, how can mutualists and communists agree on the ends, never mind the means, their organisation supports? One believes in co-operation within a (modified) market system and reforming capitalism away, while the other believes in the abolition of commodity production and money, seeing revolution as the means of so doing. Ultimately, all they could do would be to agree to disagree and thus any joint programmes and activity would be somewhat limited. It could, indeed, be argued that both Voline and Faure forgot essential points, namely what is this common denominator between the different kinds of anarchism, how do we achieve it and what is in it? For without this agreed common position, many synthesist organisations do end up becoming little more than talking shops, escaping from any social or organisational perspective. This seems to have been the fate of many groups in Britain and America during the 1960s and 1970s, for example.

It is this (potential) disunity that lead the authors of the Platform to argue that *"[s]uch an organisation having incorporated heterogeneous theoretical and practical elements, would only be a mechanical assembly of individuals each having a different conception of all the questions of the anarchist movement, an assembly which would inevitably disintegrate on encountering reality."* [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 12] The Platform suggested *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* as a means of overcoming this problem, but that term provoked massive disagreement in anarchist circles (see section J.3.4). In reply to the Platform, supporters of the "synthesis" counter by pointing to the fact that "Platformist" groups are usually very small, far smaller that "synthesis" federations (for example, compare the size of the **French Anarchist Federation** with, say, the Irish **Workers Solidarity Movement** or the French-language **Alternative Libertaire**). This means, they argue, that the Platform does not, in fact, lead to a more effective organisation, regardless of the claims of its supporters. Moreover, they argue that the requirements for *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* help ensure a small organisation as differences would express themselves in splits rather than constructive activity. Needless to say, the discussion continues within the movement on this issue!

What can be said is that this potential problem within "synthesisism" has been the cause of some organisations failing or becoming little more than talking shops, with each group doing its own thing and so making co-ordination pointless as any

agreements made would be ignored. Most supporters of the synthesis would argue that this is not what the theory aims for and that the problem lies in misunderstanding it rather than in the theory itself (as can be seen from mainland European, "synthesis" inspired federations can be **very** successful). Non-supporters are more critical, with some supporting the "Platform" as a more effective means of organising to spread anarchist ideas and influence (see the next section). Other social anarchists create the "class struggle" type of federation (this is a common organisational form in Britain, for example) as discussed in section J.3.5.

The Platform is a current within anarcho-communism which has specific suggestions on the nature and form which an anarchist federation should take. Its roots lie in the Russian anarchist movement, a section of which, in 1926, published ***"The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists"*** when in exile from the Bolshevik dictatorship. The authors of the work included Nestor Makhno, Peter Arshinov and Ida Mett. At the time it provoked intense debate (and still does in many anarchist circles) between supporters of the Platform (usually called "Platformists") and those who oppose it (which includes other communist-anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and supporters of the "synthesis"). We will discuss why many anarchists oppose the Platform in the next section. Here we discuss what the Platform argued for.

Like the "synthesis" federation (see last section), the Platform was created in response to the experiences of the Russian Revolution. The authors of the Platform (like Voline and other supporters of the "synthesis") had participated in that Revolution and saw all their work, hopes and dreams fail as the Bolshevik state triumphed and destroyed any chances of socialism by undermining soviet democracy, workers' self-management of production, trade union democracy as well as fundamental individual freedoms and rights (see the section H.6 for details). Moreover, the authors of the Platform had been leading activists in the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine which had successfully resisted both White and Red armies in the name of working class self-determination and anarchism (see the appendix "Why does the Makhnovist movement show there is an alternative to Bolshevism? "). Facing the same problems of the Bolshevik government, the Makhnovists had actively encouraged popular self-management and organisation, freedom of speech and of association, and so on, whereas the Bolsheviks had not. Thus they were aware that anarchist ideas not only worked in practice, but that the claims of Leninists who maintained that Bolshevism (and the policies it introduced at the time) was the only "practical" response to the problems facing a revolution were false.

They wrote the pamphlet in order to examine why the anarchist movement had failed to build on its successes in gaining influence within the working class. As can be seen from libertarian participation in the factory committee movement, where workers organised self-management in their workplaces and anarchist ideas had proven to be both popular and practical. While repression by the Bolsheviks did play a part in this failure, it did not explain everything. Also important, in the eyes of the Platform authors, was the lack of anarchist organisation **before** the revolution:

"It is very significant that, in spite of the strength and incontestably positive character of libertarian ideas, and in spite of the facing up to the social revolution, and finally the heroism and innumerable sacrifices borne by the anarchists in the struggle for anarchist communism, the anarchist movement remains weak despite everything,

*and has appeared, very often, in the history of working class struggles as a small event, an episode, and not an important factor." [**Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 11]*

This weakness in the movement derived, they argued, from a number of causes, the main one being *"the absence of organisational principles and practices"* within the anarchist movement. This resulted in an anarchist movement *"represented by several local organisations advocating contradictory theories and practices, having no perspectives for the future, nor of a continuity in militant work, and habitually disappearing, hardly leaving the slightest trace behind them."* This explained the *"contradiction between the positive and incontestable substance of libertarian ideas, and the miserable state in which the anarchist movement vegetates."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 11] For anyone familiar with the anarchist movement in many countries, these words will still strike home. Thus the Platform still appears to many anarchists a relevant and important document, even if they are not Platformists.

The author's of the Platform proposed a solution to this problem, namely the creation of a new type of anarchist organisation. This organisation would be based upon communist-anarchist ideas exclusively, while recognising syndicalism as a principal method of struggle. Like most anarchists, the Platform placed class and class struggle as the centre of their analysis, recognising that the *"social and political regime of all states is above all the product of class struggle . . . The slightest change in the course of the battle of classes, in the relative locations of the forces of the class struggle, produces continuous modifications in the fabric and structure of society."* Again, like most anarchists, the Platform aimed to *"transform the present bourgeois capitalist society into a society which assures the workers the products of the labours, their liberty, independence, and social and political equality"*, one based on a *"workers organisations of production and consumption, united federatively and self-administering."* The *"birth, the blossoming, and the realisation of anarchist ideas have their roots in the life and the struggle of the working masses and are inseparable bound to their fate."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 14, p. 15, p. 19 and p. 15] Again, most anarchists (particularly social anarchists) would agree -- anarchist ideas will (and have) wither when isolated from working class life since only working class people, the vast majority, can create a free society and anarchist ideas are expressions of working class experience (remove the experience and the ideas do not develop as they should).

In order to create such a free society it is necessary, argue the Platformists, *"to work in two directions: on the one hand towards the selection and grouping of revolutionary worker and peasant forces on a libertarian communist theoretical basis (a specifically libertarian communist organisation); on the other hand, towards regrouping revolutionary workers and peasants on an economic base of production and consumption (revolutionary workers and peasants organised around production [i.e. syndicalism]; workers and free peasants co-operatives)."* Again, most anarchists would agree with this along with the argument that *"anarchism should become the leading concept of revolution . . . The leading position of anarchist ideas in the revolution suggests an orientation of events after anarchist theory. However, this theoretical driving force should not be confused with the political leadership of the statist parties which leads finally to State Power."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 20 and p. 21]

This *"leadership of ideas"* (as it has come to be known) would aim at developing and co-ordinating libertarian feelings already existing within social struggle. *"Although the masses,"* explained the Platform, *"express themselves profoundly in social movements in terms of anarchist tendencies and tenets, these . . . do however remain dispersed, being uncoordinated, and consequently do not lead to the . . . preserving [of] the anarchist orientation of the social revolution."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 21] The Platform argued that a specific anarchist organisation was required to ensure that the libertarian tendencies initially expressed in any social revolution or movement (for example, free federation, self-management in mass assemblies, mandating of delegates, decentralisation, etc.) do not get undermined by statists and authoritarians who have their own agendas. This would be done by actively working in mass organisation and winning people to libertarian ideas and practices by argument (see section J.3.6).

However, these principles do not, in themselves, determine a Platformist organisation. After all, most anarcho-syndicalists and non-Platformist communist-anarchists would agree with these positions. The main point which distinguishes the Platform is its position on how an anarchist organisation should be structured and work. This is sketched in the *"Organisational Section,"* the shortest and most contentious part of the whole work. They called this the **General Union of Anarchists** and where they introduced the concepts of ***"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"*** and ***"Collective Responsibility,"*** concepts which are unique to the Platform. Even today within the anarchist movement these are contentious ideas so it is worth exploring them in a little more detail.

By *"Theoretical Unity"* the Platform meant any anarchist organisation must come to an agreement on the theory upon which it is based. In other words, that members of the organisation must agree on a certain number of basic points, such as class struggle, social revolution and libertarian communism, and so on. An organisation in which half the members thought that union struggles were important and the other half that they were a waste of time would not be effective as the membership would spend all their time arguing with themselves. While most Platformists admit that everyone will not agree on everything, they think it is important to reach as much agreement as possible, and to translate this into action. Once a theoretical position is reached, the members have to argue it in public (even if they initially opposed it within the organisation but they do have the right to get the decision of the organisation changed by internal discussion). Which brings us to *"Tactical Unity"* by which the Platform meant that the members of an organisation should struggle together **as an organised force** rather than as individuals. Once a strategy has been agreed by the Union, all members would work towards ensuring its success (even if they initially opposed it). In this way resources and time are concentrated in a common direction, towards an agreed objective.

Thus *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* means an anarchist organisation that agrees specific ideas and the means of applying them. The Platform's basic assumption is that there is a link between coherency and efficiency. By increasing the coherency of the organisation by making collective decisions and applying them, the Platform argues that this will increase the influence of anarchist ideas. Without this, they argue, more organised groups (such as Leninist ones) would be in a better position to have their arguments heard and listened to than anarchists would. Anarchists cannot be complacent, and rely on the hope that the obvious strength and rightness of our ideas

will shine through and win the day. As history shows, this rarely happens and when it does, the authoritarians are usually in positions of power to crush the emerging anarchist influence (this was the case in Russia, for example). Platformists argue that the world we live in is the product of struggles between competing ideas of how society should be organised and if the anarchist voice is weak, quiet and disorganised it will not be heard and other arguments, other perspectives, will win the day.

Which brings us to *"Collective Responsibility,"* which the Platform defines as *"the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union."* In short, that each member should support the decisions made by the organisation and that each member should take part in the process of collective decision making process. Without this, argue Platformists, any decisions made will be paper ones as individuals and groups would ignore the agreements made by the federation (the Platform calls this *"the tactic of irresponsible individualism"*). [**Op. Cit.**, p. 32] With *"Collective Responsibility,"* the strength of all the individuals that make up the group is magnified and collectively applied.

The last principle in the *"Organisational Section"* of the Platform is *"Federalism,"* which it defined as *"the free agreement of individuals and organisations to work collectively towards a common objective"* and which *"reconciles the independence and initiative of individuals and the organisation with service to the common cause."* However, the Platform argued that this principle has been *"deformed"* within the movement to mean the *"right"* to *"manifest one's 'ego,' without obligation to account for duties as regards the organisation"* one is a member of. In order to overcome this problem, they stress that *"the federalist type of anarchist organisation, while recognising each member's rights to independence, free opinion, individual liberty and initiative, requires each member to undertake fixed organisation duties, and demands execution of communal decisions."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 33 and pp. 33-4]

As part of their solution to the problem of anarchist organisation, the Platform suggested that each group would have *"its secretariat, executing and guiding theoretically the political and technical work of the organisation."* Moreover, the Platform urged the creation of an ***"executive committee of the Union"*** which would *"be in charge"* of *"the execution of decisions taken by the Union with which it is entrusted; the theoretical and organisational orientation of the activity of isolated organisations consistent with the theoretical positions and the general tactical lines of the Union; the monitoring of the general state of the movement; the maintenance of working and organisational links between all the organisations in the Union; and with other organisation."* The rights, responsibilities and practical tasks of the executive committee are fixed by the congress of the Union. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 34]

This suggestion, unsurprisingly, meet with strong disapproval by most anarchists, as we will see in the next section, who argued that this would turn the anarchist movement into a centralised, hierarchical party similar to the Bolsheviks. Needless to say, supporters of the Platform reject this argument and point out that the Platform itself is not written in stone and needs to be discussed fully and modified as required. In fact, few, if any, Platformist groups, do have this *"secretariat"* structure (it could, in fact, be argued that there are no actual "Platformist" groups, rather groups influenced by the Platform, namely on the issues of *"Theoretical and Tactical Unity"* and *"Collective Responsibility"*).

Similarly, most modern day Platformists reject the idea of gathering all anarchists into one organisation. The original Platform seemed to imply that the**General Union** would be an umbrella organisation, made up of different groups and individuals. Most Platformists would argue that not only will there never be one organisation which encompasses everyone, they do not think it necessary. Instead they envisage the existence of a number of organisations, each internally unified, each co-operating with each other where possible, a much more amorphous and fluid entity than a **General Union of Anarchists**.

As well as the original Platform, most Platformists place the **Manifesto of Libertarian Communism** by Georges Fontenis and **Towards a Fresh Revolution** by the *"Friends of Durruti"* as landmark texts in the Platformist tradition. A few anarcho-syndicalists question this last claim, arguing that the *"Friends of Durruti"* manifesto has strong similarities with the CNT's pre-1936 position on revolution and thus is an anarcho-syndicalist document, going back to the position the CNT ignored after July 19th, 1936. Alexandre Skirda's book **Facing the Enemy** contains the key documents on the original Platformists (including the original draft Platform, supplementary documents clarifying issues and polemics against critiques). There are numerous Platformist and Platformist influenced organisations in the world today, such as the Irish **Workers Solidarity Movement** and Italian**Federation of Anarchist Communists**.

In the next section we discuss the objections that most anarchists have towards the Platform.

When the "Platform" was published it provoked a massive amount of debate and comment, the majority of it critical. Most of famous anarchists rejected the Platform. Indeed, only Nestor Makhno (who co-authored the work) supported its proposals, with (among others) Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Voline, G.P. Maximoff, Luigi Fabbri, Camilo Berneri and Errico Malatesta rejecting its suggestions on how anarchists should organise. Some argued that the Platform was trying to *"Bolshevise"* anarchism (*""They are only one step away from bolshevism."* [*"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, pp. 32-6, **Constructive Anarchism**, G.P. Maximoff (ed.), pp. 36]). Others, such as Malatesta, suggested that the authors were too impressed by the apparent "success" of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Since then, it has continued to provoke a lot of debate in anarchist circles. So why do so many anarchists oppose the Platform?

While many of the anti-Platformists made points about most parts of the Platform (both Maximoff and Voline pointed out that while the Platform denied the need of a *"Transitional Period"* in theory, it accepted it in practice, for example) the main bone of contention was found in the*"Organisational Section"* with its call for *"Tactical and Theoretical Unity," "Collective Responsibility"* and group and executive *"secretariats"* guiding the organisation. Here most anarchists found ideas they considered incompatible with libertarian ideas. We will concentrate on this issue as it is usually considered as the most important.

Today, in some quarters of the libertarian movement, the Platformists are often dismissed as "would-be leaders." Yet this was not where Malatesta and other critics of the Platform took issue. Malatesta and Maximoff both argued that, to use Maximoff's words, anarchists should *"go into the masses. . . , work[ing] with them, struggle for their soul, and attempt to win it **ideologically** [sic!] and give it guidance."* So the question was *"not the rejection of**leadership,** but making certain it is **free** and*

natural." [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19] Moreover, as Maximoff noted, the "synthesis" anarchists came to the same conclusion. Thus all sides of the debate accepted that anarchists should take the lead. The question, as Malatesta and the others saw it, was not whether to lead, but rather **how** you should lead - a fairly important distinction.

Malatesta posed two alternatives, either you *"provide leadership by advice and example leaving people themselves to . . . adopt our methods and solutions if these are, or seem to be, better than those suggested and carried out by others"* or you can *"direct by taking over command, that is by becoming a government."* He asked the Platformists: *"In which manner do you wish to direct?"* While he thought, from his knowledge of Makhno and his work, that the answer would be the first option, he was *"assailed by doubt that [Makhno] would also like to see, within the general movement, a central body that would, in an authoritarian manner, dictate the theoretical and practical programme for the revolution."* This was because of the*"Executive Committee"* in the Platform which would *"give ideological and organisational direction to the association."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 108 and p. 110]

Maximoff made the same point, arguing that the Platform implied that anarchists in the unions are responsible to the anarchist federation, **not** to the union assemblies that elected them. As he put it, according to the Platform anarchists *"are to join the Trades Unions with ready-made recipes and are to carry out their plans, if necessary, against the will of the Unions themselves."* This was just one example of a general problem, namely that the Platform *"places its Party on the same height as the Bolsheviks do, i.e., it places the interests of the Party above the interests of the masses since the Party has the monopoly of understanding these interests."* [**Constructive Anarchism**, p. 19 and p. 18] This flowed from the Platform arguing that anarchists must *"enter into revolutionary trade unions as an organised force, responsible to accomplish work in the union before the general anarchist organisation and orientated by the latter."* However, Maximoff's argument may be considered harsh as the Platform also argued that anarchism*"aspires neither to political power nor dictatorship"* and so they would hardly be urging the opposite principles within the trade union movement. [**The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists**, p. 25 and p. 21] If we take the Platform's comments within a context informed by the*"leadership of ideas"* concept (see section J.3.6) then what they meant was simply that the anarchist group would convince the union members of the validity of their ideas by argument which was something Maximoff did not disagree with. In short, the disagreement becomes one of unclear (or bad) use of language by the Platform's authors.

Despite many efforts and many letters on the subject (in particular between Malatesta and Makhno) the question of "leadership" could not be clarified to either side's satisfaction, in part because there was an additional issue in dispute. This was the related issue of organisational principles (which in themselves make up the defining part of the original Platform). Malatesta argued that this did not conform with anarchist methods and principles, and so could not *"help bring about the triumph of anarchism."* [**The Anarchist Revolution**, p. 97] This was because of two main reasons, the first being the issue of the Platform's "secretariats" and "executive committee" and the issue of "Collective Responsibility." We will take each in turn.

With an structure based round "secretariats" and "executive committees" the *"will of the [General] Union [of Anarchists] can only mean the will of the majority, expressed through congresses which nominate and control the* ***Executive Committee*** *and decide on all important issues. Naturally, the congresses would consist of representatives elected by the majority of member groups . . . So, in the best of cases, the decisions would be taken by a majority of a majority, and this could easily, especially when the opposing opinions are more than two, represent only a minority."* This, Malatesta argued, *"comes down to a pure majority system, to pure parliamentarianism"* and so non-anarchist in nature. [**Op. Cit.**, p. 100]

As long as a Platformist federation is based on *"secretariats"* and *"executive committees"* directing the activity and development of the organisation, this critique is valid. In such a system, as these bodies control the organisation and members are expected to follow their decisions (due to *"theoretical and tactical unity"* and *"collective responsibility"*) they are, in effect, the government of the association. While this government may be elected and accountable, it is still a government simply because these bodies have executive power. As Maximoff argued, individual initiative in the Platform *"has a special character . . . Each organisation (i.e. association of members with the right to individual initiative) has its secretariat which . . .* ***directs*** *the ideological, political and technical activities of the organisation . . . In what, then, consists the self-reliant activities of the rank-and-file members? Apparently in one thing: initiative to obey the secretariat and carry out its directives."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 18] This seems to be the logical conclusion of the structure suggested by the Platform. *"The spirit,"* argued Malatesta, *"the tendency remains authoritarian and the educational effect would remain anti-anarchist."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 98]

Malatesta, in contrast, argued that an anarchist organisation must be based on the *"[f]ull autonomy, full independence and therefore the full responsibility of individuals and groups"* with all organisational work done *"freely, in such a way that the thought and initiative of individuals is not obstructed."* The individual members of such an organisation *"express any opinion and use any tactic which is not in contradiction with accepted principles and which does not harm the activities of others."* Moreover, the administrative bodies such organisations nominate would *"have no executive powers, have no directive powers"* leaving it up to the groups and their federal meetings to decide their own fates. The congresses of such organisations would be *"free from any kind of authoritarianism, because they do not lay down the law; they do not impose their own resolutions on others . . . and do not become binding and enforceable except on those who accept them."* [**Op. Cit.**, p. 101, p. 102 and p. 101] Such an organisation does not exclude collective decisions and self-assumed obligations, rather it is based upon them.

Most groups inspired by the Platform, however, seem to reject this aspect of its organisational suggestions. Instead of "secretariats" and "executive committees" they have regular conferences and meetings to reach collective decisions on issues and practice unity that way. Thus the **really** important issue is of *"theoretical and tactical unity"* and *"collective responsibility,"* rather than ithe structure suggested by the Platform. Indeed, this issue was the main topic in Makhno's letter to Malatesta, for example, and so we would be justified in saying that this is the key issue dividing "Platformists" from other anarchists.

So in what way did Malatesta disagree with this concept? As we mentioned in the last section, the Platform defined the idea of "Collective Responsibility" as *"the entire Union will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of each member; in the same way, each member will be responsible for the political and revolutionary activity of the Union."* To which Malatesta replied:

*"But if the Union is responsible for what each member does, how can it leave to its members and to the various groups the freedom to apply the common programme in the way they think best? How can one be responsible for an action if it does not have the means to prevent it? Therefore, the Union and in its name the Executive Committee, would need to monitor the action of the individual member and order them what to do and what not to do; and since disapproval after the event cannot put right a previously accepted responsibility, no-one would be able to do anything at all before having obtained the go-ahead, the permission of the committee. And, on the other hand, can an individual accept responsibility for the actions of a collectivity before knowing what it will do and if he cannot prevent it doing what he disapproves of?"[**Op. Cit.**, p. 99]*

In other words, the term *"collective responsibility"* (if taken literally) implies a highly inefficient and somewhat authoritarian mode of organisation. Before any action could be undertaken, the organisation would have to be consulted and this would crush individual, group and local initiative. The organisation would respond slowly to developing situations, if at all, and this response would not be informed by first hand knowledge and experience. Moreover, this form of organisation implies a surrendering of individual judgement, as members would have to *"submit to the decisions of the majority before they have even heard what those might be."* [Malatesta, **Op. Cit.**, 101] In the end, all a member could do would be to leave the organisation if they disagree with a tactic or position and could not bring themselves to further it by their actions.

This structure also suggests that the Platform's commitment to federalism is in words only. As most anarchists critical of the Platform argued, while its authors affirm federalist principles they, in fact, *"outline a perfectly centralised organisation with an Executive Committee that has responsibility to give ideological and organisational direction to the different anarchist organisations, which in turn will direct the professional organisations of the workers."*[*"The Reply by Several Russian Anarchists"*, **Op. Cit.**, pp. 35-6]

Thus it is likely that "Collective Responsibility" taken to its logical conclusion would actually **hinder** anarchist work by being too bureaucratic and slow. However, let us assume that by applying collective responsibility as well as tactical and theoretical unity, anarchist resources and time will be more efficiently utilised. What is the point of being "efficient" if the collective decision reached is wrong or is inapplicable to many areas? Rather than local groups applying their knowledge of local conditions and developing theories and policies that reflect these conditions (and co-operating from the bottom up), they may be forced to apply inappropriate policies due to the "Unity" of the Platformist organisation. It is true that Makhno argued that the *"activities of local organisations can be adapted, as far as possible, to suit local conditions"* but only if they are *"consonant with the pattern of the overall organisational practice of the Union of anarchists covering the whole country."* [**The Struggle Against the State and**

Other Essays, p. 62] Which still begs the question on the nature of the Platform's unity (however, it does suggest that the Platform's position may be less extreme than might be implied by the text, as we will discuss). That is why anarchists have traditionally supported federalism and free agreement within their organisations, to take into account the real needs of localities.

If we do not take the Platform's definition of "Collective Responsibility" literally or to its logical extreme (as Makhno's comments suggest) then the differences between Platformists and non-Platformists may not be that far. As Malatesta pointed out in his reply to Makhno's letter:

"I accept and support the view that anyone who associates and co-operates with others for a common purpose must feel the need to co-ordinate his [or her] actions with those of his [or her] fellow members and do nothing that harms the work of others . . . and respect the agreements that have been made . . . [Moreover] I maintain that those who do not feel and do not practice that duty should be thrown out of the association.

*"Perhaps, speaking of collective responsibility, you mean precisely that accord and solidarity that must exist among members of an association. And if that is so, your expression amounts . . . to an incorrect use of language, but basically it would only be an unimportant question of wording and agreement would soon be reached." [**Op. Cit.**, pp. 107-8]*

This, indeed, seems to be the way that most Platformist organisations do operate. They have agreed broad theoretical and tactical positions on various subjects (such as, for example, the nature of trade unions and how anarchists relate to them) while leaving it to local groups to act within these guidelines. Moreover, the local groups do not have to report to the organisation before embarking on an activity. In other words, most Platformist groups do not take the Platform literally and so many differences are, to a large degree, a question of wording. As two supporters of the Platform note:

*"The Platform doesn't go into detail about how collective responsibility works in practice. There are issues it leaves untouched such as the question of people who oppose the majority view. We would argue that obviously people who oppose the view of the majority have a right to express their own views, however in doing so they must make clear that they don't represent the view of the organisation. If a group of people within the organisation oppose the majority decision they have the right to organise and distribute information so that their arguments can be heard within the organisation as a whole. Part of our anarchism is the belief that debate and disagreement, freedom and openness strengthens both the individual and the group to which she or he belongs." [Aileen O'Carroll and Alan MacSimoin, "The Platform", pp. 29-31, **Red and Black Revolution**, no. 4, p. 30]*

While many anarchists are critical of Platformist groups for being too centralised for their liking, it is the case that the Platform has influenced many anarchist organisations, even non-Platformist ones (this can be seen in the "class struggle" groups

discussed in the next section). This influence has been both ways, with the criticism the original Platform was subjected to having had an effect on how Platformist groups have developed. This, of course, does not imply that there is little or no difference between Platformists and other anarchists. Platformist groups tend to stress "collective responsibility" and "theoretical and tactical unity" more than others, which has caused problems when Platformists have worked within "synthesis" organisations (as was the case in France, for example, which resulted in much bad-feeling between Platformists and others).

Constructive Anarchism by the leading Russian anarcho-syndicalist G.P. Maximoff gathers all the relevant documents in one place. As well as Maximoff's critique of the Platform, it includes the "synthesis" reply, Malatesta's review and subssequent exchange of letters between him and Makhno.**The Anarchist Revolution** also contains Malatesta's article and the exchange of letters between him and Makhno.

After Winter Must Come Spring: A Self-Critical Analysis of the Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation

The Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation was formed in the United States in 1993 out of the remaining groups in the Love and Rage Network, itself formed in 1989. Although it was short lived (only active 93 to 98) it became one of the most influential forces in North American anarchism before splitting into a number of groups. In 1998, as the culmination of a number of internal contradictions, the organization split with some forming the Fire by Night Organizing Committee and the Bring the Ruckus! federation, some publishing The Utopian and some choosing to enter the platformist North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists. This particular analysis of Love and Rage's history comes from the Fire by Night Organizing Committee, itself extremely short lived as well, with the New York branch dissolving itself in 2000 and the San Francisco branch choosing to enter the post-Maoist, Left Refoundationist Freedom Road Socialist Organization/Organización Socialista del Camino para la Libertad. This was published shortly before the demise of Fire by Night, and was republished by the FRSO/OSCL as a pamphlet with a new introduction by the Fire by Night former members and the Fire by Night Points of Unity. I would also like to add that while I am a Marxist, I do feel it is important to learn the lessons of not just our own failings, such as the crimes of Stalinism, but also to learn from those of others, especially the anarchists because both have lessons for all of us in areas like organization. I also feel that in general Marxists can learn alot from what little there is of anarchist theory, especially as it concerns the relationship between the individual and the collective. We also need to work to combat sectarianism between the two great revolutionary traditions of the last two centuries. We have to admit it, the anarchists and the Marxists, that if we are ever to achieve revolution we must resolve the contradictions inherent between the two of us.

On May 23, 1998 the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation dissolved. Several days later, after a series of meetings, a number of its former members launched the Fire by Night Organizing Committee. In this pamphlet, we try to evaluate our experiences with Love and Rage. We hope to draw lessons from our experience that will

help us move forward in our continued struggle for social justice and freedom. The first part of this pamphlet relates to the history of Love and Rage: its origins, its course of development, and the events leading up to its final dissolution. The second part examines both the accomplishments and the failures of Love and Rage and looks for their roots in our theory and methods of work. The final section begins to address our vision of a reinvigorated revolutionary movement in the United States, and how we see Fire by Night contributing to its construction. Over the years, many Love and Rage members pointed out the weaknesses that are acknowledged here, but were not listened to. Some of them left the organization out of frustration. Others stuck it out to the end. Some of them are part of Fire by Night, while others are not. This pamphlet is dedicated to all of those people who struggled to make Love and Rage the organization it should have been, but never was.

PART I: A BRIEF HISTORY

Love and Rage was founded as a "continental revolutionary anarchist newsmonthly" with a section in Spanish, at a conference in Chicago in November 1989. The roughly 75 people who founded Love and Rage included several representatives of anarchist collectives from across the United States and Canada, a number of individual anarchist activists, and about 20 former members of the Revolutionary Socialist League (RSL), a small Trotskyist group that had turned towards anarchism in the late 1980s. The prospects for building a revolutionary anarchist organization in North America looked particularly bright. During the1980s, a vibrant anarchist movement composed mainly of small collectives and affinity groups had sprouted and established itself as a radical and militant voice within a number of larger social movements. From nuclear disarmament to South African and Central American solidarity to ACT UP to campus organizing, anarchists played an important role, pushing for democracy in these movements and for direct action in the streets. At the same time, the traditional Marxist left was in a state of advanced decomposition. The Tienanmen Square massacre, the collapse of the Soviet empire, and the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas all suggested the irrelevance of the old Marxist left and the importance of anti-authoritarianism to any revived movement. Increased activity in the social movements suggested space for a new force - a serious and dedicated revolutionary anarchist organization - that could consolidate the scattered anarchist groups and individuals to deepen their impact on the tone and character of this upsurge. Love and Rage was the only revolutionary organization of national scope founded in this period whose creators didn't come out of the upsurge of the 1960s and 70s. With the exception of the ex-RSL members, we had little or no experience trying to build a serious revolutionary organization. Despite this fact (or because of it), we were very optimistic about our new project. This optimism allowed us to accomplish things that many predicted we wouldn't, but it also led to a number of the mistakes that would ultimately spell the demise of Love and Rage eight years later.

From Newspaper to Network

From the beginning, most people involved in Love and Rage saw the newspaper as a vehicle to build a continental organization, or at least a firmer infrastructure for a revolutionary anarchist movement. By building the structure necessary to write,

produce and distribute a genuinely continental newspaper, we were putting in place the basic elements of an organization. We used the newspaper to build anarchist participation in the Earth Day 20th anniversary actions being organized by the Left Greens and the Youth Greens in the spring of 1990. During the Gulf War, Love and Rage issued a call for an anarchist contingent to a March on Washington that broke away from the main demonstration and carried out an attack on World Bank headquarters. The Gulf War marked an important turning point for radical politics in the US. While opposition to the war was massive, it proved unable to put a brake on the wholesale slaughter of at least 100,000 Iraqis by US-led forces or even register much on American national consciousness. Ironically, the lull in activity following the war contributed to the growth of Love and Rage as many smaller anarchist projects fell apart and their members looked for something to grab onto. After a year and a half of monthly publication and intense participation in the Earth Day and Gulf War work, supporters of the newspaper held our second conference in the summer of 1991 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. There we formally constituted ourselves as the Love and Rage Network. The Network took on two ill-fated organizing projects for 1992 that led to crisis a year down the line. One campaign advocated a boycott of the 1992 Presidential elections. The other, an Anti-Racist Summer Project targeted a working-class white neighborhood in East St. Paul, Minnesota where nazi skinheads and the KKK were actively organizing. The boycott campaign fizzled because Love and Rage was unable to build a strong and broad enough coalition. The Anti-Racist Summer Project, organized in conjunction with Twin Cities Anti-Racist Action (ARA), relocated activists from across the US and Canada to East St. Paul for the summer to work full time building a community-based anti-racist bulkhead there. But the plan of action was unclear and more time was spent wrangling with internal dynamics than in any sort of effective organizing against the white supremacists.

From Network to Organization

The failure of both our projects in 1992 brought on a crisis and some soul-searching. Two main perspectives emerged. One held that Love and Rage was too centralized and concentrated too much of its energy on building an organizational structure at the expense of building up strong local collectives. The opposing perspective stressed the maintenance and strengthening of a continental organization, united around a common politics and committed to developing and carrying out a common strategy. Folks in this camp proposed that we define membership in the organization, draft a set of bylaws, write a political statement, and concentrate our work in two or three key areas. This conflict came to a head at Love and Rage's 1993 conference in San Diego. The organization-minded camp won out and we changed our name to the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation.

Amor y Rabia

In 1992, our Mexican comrades established a local in Mexico City. They began publishing a Spanish-language edition of the newspaper, Amor y Rabia, a year later. With this development, the US-based newspaper eliminated its Spanish section and started distributing the Mexican Amor y Rabia to our Spanish-language readership. The Mexican and US/Canadian sections of the organization began working more closely

together after the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) launched their uprising on January 1, 1994 in the state of Chiapas. We promptly recognized that the politics of the EZLN were distinct from those of previous national liberation movements in ways that were important to anti-authoritarians. Amor y Rabia and Love and Rage became important early sources of information about the Zapatista. We sought to provide direct material aid to the Zapatistas in a variety of forms. The most significant was the creation of the Martyrs of Chicago Direct Solidarity Encampment sponsored by Amor y Rabia for 14 months in the Zapatista community of Santa Rosa El Copal. The Martyrs of Chicago Encampment brought forth a number of internal contradictions in Amor y Rabia that ultimately led to its disintegration as an organization.

The Search for a Strategy

From the beginning, Love and Rage lacked unity on any sort of overarching strategy for anarchist revolution in North America. Instead we had what was sometimes called "a strategy for a strategy." Since we didn't have the critical mass of people or experience to really articulate a coherent strategy, the argument went, we should instead work on getting enough anarchist activists together around certain elementary points of unity and areas of activity so that the discussion of strategy could really begin. This may have worked had the momentum of 1989 held out. But a revolutionary organization cannot be built on the basis of waiting for objective conditions to propel things forward. It must have a plan of action, no matter how modest. The most important step we took towards developing a strategy was to set up working groups. Working groups were meant to concentrate our activism in two or three areas so that we might have a greater impact. In practice, our selection of areas of work only ratified the choices members had already made as individuals. In the summer of 1995 the New York City local made a collective decision to concentrate our organizing work in the student movement at the City University of New York. Love and Rage members had played leadership roles in the movement against tuition hikes and budget cuts that spring, which had culminated in a demonstration of about 25,000 young people, mostly Black and Latino and many of them high school students. The CUNY student movement was our most successful break with the mainly-white anarchist scene and it gave us a much fuller understanding of how white skin privilege works to divide white radicals from the struggles of people of color. The members involved often found themselves challenged politically by the radical activists of color who were their closest comrades in the student movement. Questions came up that were difficult for anarchists to answer. For example, Love and Rage members had argued against getting a police permit for a march on Wall Street on March 23, 1995. Although students fought back bravely and militantly against the police, they had not been seasoned by years of radical street actions as most anarchists had been. 3,000 police prevented the march of 25,000 college and high school students from leaving City Hall by brutally beating, macing and arresting students, many of whom were at their first demonstration. The student movement found itself unable to draw significant numbers to any event for years afterward. It became clearer to most activist members of the New York Love and Rage local that we needed to develop a strategy, one that would not rely on radical tactics alone, one that we could plan out and test in practice collectively.

The Debate

The debates that led to the dissolution of Love and Rage have echoes going back to the founding of the organization. But the last chapter in the conflict began essentially with the publication of an essay called "The Historical Failure of Anarchism." The paper argued that the anarchist movement had failed to adequately confront its historical defeats, particularly in the Spanish Revolution, and so anarchism had become theoretically impoverished. It called on anarchists to re-examine certain assumptions and tenets, and to look at the experiences of non-anarchist revolutions in the 20th century for both positive and negative lessons. Most provocatively, it argued that the exclusive reliance on militias by anarchists in Spain had been a military disaster, and upheld the position of the Friends of Durrutti who had called for the formation of a revolutionary army. While this essay was not intended as an attempt to outline a strategic orientation for Love and Rage, it quickly became the object of heated polemics that overshadowed the efforts to talk about a strategy for the organization. Two former members of the RSL wrote attacks on the essay that suggested that it was the first step down the slippery slope towards Stalinism. Many other members took issue with the essay as well. At this point, several members of the New York local sought to redirect the debate towards questions of organizing method, drawing variously on Paolo Friere's theories of pedagogy, Mao Ze Dong's theory of "Mass Line," and the Zapatistas' notion of "Mandar Obedeciendo" (leading by obeying). These members saw reflection on our own organizing as a necessary component of developing an effective revolutionary strategy. The ex-RSL members and several others attacked this organizing approach promoted by the New York members as reformist, and as a tailing after the lowest common denominator politics of the masses. Several ex-RSLers argued instead for the development of an "Anarchist Transitional Program" (presumably similar to the Transitional Program of the Trotskyists). This would be a program of demands, such as calling for a general strike, that anarchists should fight for in the course of reform struggles and would supposedly lead those struggles towards revolutionary conclusions. The debate over organizing method exposed how little anarchist theory has to say on the question. The main theoretical concepts on both sides of this debate were taken from outside anarchism, though some tried to dress them up with examples from anarchist history or calls to "read Malatesta."

The Breakup

While many members of Love and Rage agreed and disagreed with both sides on various debates, two distinct camps eventually emerged. Those caught in the middle never coalesced into a distinct tendency of their own and found themselves forced to either choose sides or watch from the sidelines. In the Fall of 1997, 13 members signed a factional document called "What We Believe," written by several ex-RSL members, which drew final lines in the debate. WWB laid out a list of principles it argued had been questioned by the writings or actions of other unnamed members. Much of WWB reiterated basic tenets of anarchism which were generally accepted by everyone in Love and Rage. However, on some key points WWB was quite contentious. The first was a statement that all of the theoretical weaknesses of anarchism could be answered from "within anarchism." This singled out for attack those members who wanted Love and Rage to develop new living theory with influences from Marxism, feminism, revolutionary nationalism and elsewhere. The second point of debate centered on the question of the system of white skin privileges. WWB stated that white workers have

only "petty and apparent" privileges over workers of color. It dismissed the idea that whites get very real material benefits from the racist system we live under, benefits which have blocked their effective participation in revolutionary struggles. Finally, WWB called for building democratic mass movements even though many of the signatories had not been involved in any mass work whatsoever for years. WWB forced everybody in Love and Rage to take sides by proclaiming that anybody who did not accept the document's principles had no place in the organization. Many members of the organization felt either that the document did not address issues crucial to Love and Rage's progress or that it was trying to force us to take a fighting stance on positions before we had had a thorough debate. WWB appeared when the organization was in a profound crisis, and it deepened that crisis. The Minneapolis local had ceased to function after three key members relocated to other cities. The New York local was paralyzed by the debates that had been taking place in the organization and stopped meeting after the summer of 1997. The Michigan-based Coordinating Committee elected at the March 1997 conference never met, with the result that no decisions could be made on the Federation level. Finally, a Federation conference was scheduled for May 1998 despite the complete non-functioning of all decision-making bodies. It was clear by this time that the organization was going to split. The only question was how ugly it would get and if anything was going to come out of it. Love and Rage's last conference took place on May 23, 1998 at Hunter College in New York City. The conference was mercifully brief and largely civil. The folks assembled presented their various projects and voted to dissolve the organization. Civility broke down only when we discussed a division of the resources. It became clear that the debts of the organization were greater than any resources and that the WWB faction had no intention of paying their share. Before the conference degenerated any further it was adjourned. Following the conference, a number of non-WWB-ers met in the Love and Rage office and founded the Fire by Night Organizing Committee.

PART 2: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND MISTAKES

Our Accomplishments

The breakup of Love and Rage was demoralizing for many members. It is therefore important to make a critical analysis that acknowledges the real successes of the organization. Love and Rage was probably the most significant explicitly revolutionary anarchist organization in the United States in the latter half of the 20th century in terms of participation in mass struggles and in its influence on discussions within the anarchist movement and the broader left. Love and Rage was for the most part an organization of activists who participated in broader struggles. We played an important role in building a militant and anti-authoritarian wing within the movement against the US war in the Persian Gulf. We consistently promoted the causes of political prisoners in the pages of the newspapers and our members did important work for prison solidarity in general, and in the defense of the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal in particular. Love and Rage played important roles in the fight against Operation Rescue, in building Anti-Racist Action (ARA), in building solidarity with the Zapatistas, in the struggle against cutbacks and in defense of open admissions at CUNY, and in local struggles for welfare rights and for a living wage. In our work building Anti-Racist Action, Love and

Rage members were committed to breaking out of the confines of the while male-dominated punk scene the movement started from. In Minneapolis, Love and Rage activists helped build an ARA group led by young women, and in Detroit, they helped build an ARA group that was mostly people of color. The most significant single accomplishment of Love and Rage was probably the continuous publication of the English- and Spanish-language newspapers, which were the most reliably published anarchist periodicals in the US and Mexico in the 1990s. They were a source of international news that was otherwise largely unavailable in North America. For overseas readers, they were a consistent source of news about social struggles in the US and Mexico. The newspaper never simply rehashed a "line," but published articles from a variety of anti-authoritarian perspectives. We also published criticisms about ourselves even if we thought they lacked merit, and refused to publish attacks on other anarchist projects even when this policy was not reciprocated. As a result, Love and Rage was a very non-sectarian newspaper despite the controversies that continued to circle around the organization. Love and Rage fought for the development of a critical anti-authoritarian analysis of white supremacy rooted in the particular historical experience of North American society. We also struggled against the then-dominant position within the anarchist movement that crudely equated all nationalisms, whether imperialist forms of nationalism or anti-imperialist national liberation struggles. Love and Rage covered the struggles for reproductive freedom, against sexual violence, for a just response to the AIDS epidemic, and for queer liberation. We promoted the development of a radical movement for women's self-defense and empowerment. We sought to focus attention on the struggles of poor and working-class women and women of color. Over the years, we helped carve out significantly larger space for these politics within the anarchist movement. This space was filled by new groups and projects, many of whom had little awareness of how recently these politics had been treated with complete hostility within the anarchist movement. Love and Rage developed an internal structure and a set of processes for debate and discussion that were a dramatic improvement on the practices of the larger anarchist movement. Love and Rage used a "modified consensus" method of decision-making that sought consensus but used majority votes to settle unresolvable issues. We tried to incorporate elements of feminist process developed by the women's liberation movement into our decision-making process as well. While these processes functioned imperfectly, they moved us toward a real democratic internal life as an organization.

Our Mistakes

Along the way, Love and Rage made some real if modest contributions to the development of revolutionary theory and practice in a very difficult period. But the fact remains that we failed to build the kind of organization we were convinced was necessary to bring about the kind of revolutionary change we still see as a condition for real human freedom. It is tempting to blame this failure on the times, or to blame it on this individual or that group of people within the organization. But revolutionary organizations must be able to survive hard times and to deal with the inevitable limitations of the people who make them up. The failure to meet such challenges is fundamentally a political failure which must have its roots in the theory and practice of the organization.

Step by Step

One mistake made by some of the founders of Love and Rage was to think that people would, in a step-by-step fashion, come to see the necessity of the various component parts of a serious revolutionary organization. Some of the original proponents of the newspaper wanted to build a tighter organization from the start. Although they knew that others disagreed with them, they thought that people could struggle through differences over the ultimate vision as we went along, instead of splitting to work on separate projects. The main reason behind this error was that the anarchist tradition in which we placed ourselves had little historical experience and practically no serious theory for building the kind of organization we were trying to build. Some of our most basic ideas about our own project can be found in the Leninist tradition of which we were (and still are) critical. Many of these ideas are common sense features of any serious revolutionary organization: basic security precautions, the need for unity in theory and action, and a developed analysis of imperialism. Rather than honestly acknowledge a debt to Leninism, these members sought to restate the case for each of these elements within an anarchist framework and in reference to the historical experiences of the anarchist movement. We were convinced that we could redefine anarchism in a step-by-step manner as the success of each step pointed to the necessity of the next. The step-by-step approach worked to a degree. The newspaper became the basis for the Network, which led to the Federation. But many people were recruited to Love and Rage on the basis of what it was, because we weren't clear enough about what we wanted it to become. Some of these people would be won to the need for the next step, whatever that happened to be, but others tended to oppose it. The process of putting in place the most elementary features of an organization became agonizingly slow and many good people left over the years out of frustration with this glacial pace.

The RSL

From our inception, we deliberately played down the role of the ex-RSLers in Love and Rage. This was a response to the rabid sectarianism of much of the anarchist movement at that time, which led to a wholly distorted account of Love and Rage, portraying it as a creation of, or even a continuation of the RSL. In fact, of the twenty ex-RSLers who started out in Love and Rage, half were gone within a year. Most of the others either became completely inactive or else were barely active in the organization. This was probably linked to the demoralizing experience of dissolving the organization they had spent two decades building. There were several issues, in particular the question of white skin privilege, on which most of the ex-RSLers were at odds with the majority position in the organization. They were able to carve out a certain space for their politics even if they were not putting them into practice through mass work. In this way, they defined a range of debate and a number of "agreements to disagree" that made it harder for the organization to more precisely define its politics. The biggest impact the ex-RSLers made on the politics of Love and Rage was by what they did not do. The ex-RSLers had been part of a common organizational project rooted in the traditions of Marxism, Leninism, and Trotskyism for two decades, and yet they never made any attempt at a collective critical summation of that experience for the benefit of Love and Rage. This failure contributed to one of the biggest weaknesses in the political culture of

Love and Rage, our repeated failure to sum up our experiences and try to draw lessons from them.

The "Iskra Principle"

Lenin used the newspaper Iskra (The Spark) to build a clandestine network of writers, editors and distributors that became the skeleton of the Bolshevik Party in Russia at the turn of the century. Love and Rage was conceived along very similar lines. Ricardo Flores Magon did the same thing with Regeneracion and Malcolm X did it with Muhammad Speaks, but the truth is that the most coherent argument for this strategy was Lenin's. It was those arguments that had convinced some of us and that we used to convince others. There are important things to be learned from reading Lenin. The importance of having a newspaper is not one of them. Leaving aside the fairly obvious point that a clandestinely-circulated revolutionary newspaper is going to have more of an impact in pre-radio turn-of-the-century Czarist Russia than in the electronic media-saturated late 20th century United States of America, this reliance on a newspaper creates big problems. The Bolsheviks' single-minded reliance on their press reflected their elitist self-conception as an organization of middle-class intellectual leaders bringing socialist consciousness to the working class. The central place of the newspaper is thus part of what's wrong with Lenin's idea of a vanguard party. Organizations built around newspapers tend to be defined less by the practice of their members in actual struggles and more by their line on various questions, a line that springs mainly from the heads of the leadership of the organization rather than from a process of reflection on the struggle as it is actually taking place. This is why the hard-working activists who build up the mass movements despise the groups that place such an emphasis on pushing their newspapers. Love and Rage members shared this contempt for the newspaper pushers and we never really fell into that pattern. Although Love and Rage was not a line newspaper, the central place of the newspaper in the life of Love and Rage had a significant impact. For one, it impeded the development of a common strategic orientation because trying to come to some sort of strategy would inevitably chase off some of the support upon which the broadly-defined newspaper depended. Also, an organization built around a newspaper will tend to attract more aspiring writers and fewer natural organizers, a dynamic which did not help counter our organizational weaknesses.

White Chauvinism

Love and Rage failed to consistently place the struggle against white supremacy at the center of our politics and to confront the inherent contradictions of being such a white organization. Love and Rage always had a few Black or Latino members in the US, but these members rarely played a leadership role in the organization. In terms of its public appearance in the United States and Canada, Love and Rage was for all intents and purposes a white organization. This reflected where we came from. The anarchist movement in the US is overwhelmingly white and closely associated with an overwhelmingly white counter-culture. While Love and Rage members engaged in a great deal of anti-racist work, we tended to treat racism as just one of a number of "issues" that members could choose to work on, rather than the strategically central question confronting revolutionaries in the United States. We thought of our work

choices in a moralistic way instead of a strategic way. The purpose of a strategic focus would be to choose a particular struggle based on historical study of which communities have been able to mobilize the most powerful and most seminal movements in US history, not on who deserves to be liberated first. But we were unable to focus strategically and make the best use of our small numbers. Thus when members worked in movements around poverty, women's liberation and queer liberation, we often did so without a clear strategic conception of how to deal with the question of white supremacy in those areas of work. The questions of our politics on white supremacy and the racial composition of the organization cannot be tidily separated. From the beginning, most -- if not all -- of us rejected the model of a "white solidarity organization" merely supporting the struggles of people of color. In contrast to this model, we were committed to building a genuinely multi-racial revolutionary anarchist organization. The problem was that without a clear analysis of the nature of white supremacy, the workings of white skin privilege and an organizational strategy for fighting them, the efforts of individual members to build such an organization were often at cross purposes. This problem always bubbled beneath the surface, but it finally erupted around two issues. The first was the decision of individuals to use the newspaper as a forum for heated polemics with Black nationalists. One white member of Love and Rage adopted the posture of a member of the Black community in these arguments. This was dishonest, opportunist and racist, but we had no clear policy to prevent or discipline such practices. The second incident involved the publication of an editorial declaring our commitment to becoming a multi-racial organization. The editorial attempted a compromise after two earlier editorials were rejected for their white chauvinism. We should never have tried to compromise on such issues. This in itself reflected our white chauvinism. Publicly declaring our commitment to becoming a genuinely multi-racial organization without having clarified in advance our analysis of white supremacy and our program for combating it only created the impression that we wanted to darken our ranks to make ourselves feel good, even if this was not the actual attitude of most of the organization. White chauvinism in Love and Rage also took the form of white guilt. We were at various times criticized by people of color both for our failure to systematically reach out to Black folks and for having a colonialist attitude in our efforts to do so. Rather than grapple with the difficult issues involved, we tended to either accept these criticisms in their totality or to not respond to them. In this way, we not only gave credence to criticisms that were entirely baseless, we undermined our own ability to deal with the valid criticisms of our practice. In effect, we put our personal desires to be validated by people of color ahead of our commitment to understand and fight white supremacy.

US Chauvinism

A related problem in Love and Rage was US chauvinism. The root of this problem was our pretensions to being a continental organization. Love and Rage was always dominated by the US section of the organization. Our treatment of Canadian reality tended to be tokenistic, and reflected the widespread national chauvinist sentiment in the US (even among radicals and revolutionaries) that Canada is "just the 51st state." The Canadian section of Love and Rage remained quite small, so there was never much pressure to really face these contradictions. The relations between the US and Mexican sections proved more problematic precisely because our Mexican section, Amor y Rabia,

became a significant force within Mexico's small anarchist movement. Love and Rage never formally acknowledged the existence of distinct national sections. In effect, we had separate organizations pretending to be one. The relationship of the US section to the Mexican section was largely one of solidarity, in the form of financial support for the publication of Amor y Rabia and various other activities of the Mexican section. In the end, we effectively ended out subsidizing the sectarian and authoritarian antics of a couple of leaders of the Mexican section (who had the most direct contacts with the US organization). That only served to discredit the larger organization. Put bluntly, having a Mexican section raised the standing of Love and Rage in the US, and we turned a blind eye to abuses we should have seen in order to preserve this relationship. This was only a disservice to our Mexican comrades, since it perpetuated problems in their organization. It was national chauvinism and opportunism on our part.

Sexism

Love and Rage had some very strong and intelligent women. Still, men outnumbered women by nearly two to one, and took up even more time in meetings than was proportional to their numbers. We tried to counter sexist dynamics by putting women in positions of leadership (although we did this sporadically) and by using feminist group process and facilitation. We had a sort of informal mentoring system for younger and newer women members who would be taken under the wing of a more experienced woman who would share her skills and help the newer member to make a place for herself in the organization. In the end, the individual and informal strategies we relied on were not enough to successfully combat the deeply entrenched male domination in Love and Rage. Aside from our inconsistent work in the struggle for reproductive freedom, and welfare organizing done by one or two members, Love and Rage never did any other explicitly feminist long-term work. As individual women and men, most of us struggled with men in the activist groups we worked in over their sexism and promoted women's leadership in those groups. We usually had one working group that we attempted to give a "feminist lens," but the success or failure of this integration of feminism into our other work was usually determined by the willingness of individual women to repeatedly push for the small measures it would entail even after the larger vision of it had been passed by a vote at the conference. Women in Love and Rage reached a point of collectively coming together to criticize sexist dynamics in Love and Rage after some particularly glaring incidents. At one conference we held a meeting with a representative from BACORR, a radical reproductive freedom group in the Bay Area, about starting a national campaign that would struggle around issues of sterilization abuse and other related issues that affected primarily women of color and poor women, as well as clinic defense. No men from Love and Rage showed up at the meeting, although the ideas we were discussing addressed some of the men's criticisms that the clinic-defense focus of the feminist work we were doing only appealed to middle-class white women. Because the men weren't doing any explicit feminist work and we never developed an internal political education program, they never had to educate themselves about women's experiences of oppression and the history of women's resistance. Even after one woman put together a set of readings on revolutionary feminism and each local had agreed to start a study group using it, only the New York local ever began a study group. Our problems of organizational liberalism

and lack of discipline led to an inability to get the organization as a whole to take up feminist questions in our theory and practice.

Organizational Liberalism

Many of the problems Love and Rage had can be connected to the general problem of organizational liberalism. We had a spirit of tolerance for practices that revolutionary organizations cannot afford to put up with. It took us nearly four years to establish any expectations of membership. After that, we progressively tightened up those expectations on paper, but since we never provided for any enforcement mechanism the expectations were meaningless. Many took advantage of the "do your own thing" atmosphere, dropping in and out of activity in some cases for years at a stretch. "Members" who never met the expectations of membership were frequently outspoken in their opposition to any attempt to further raise the expectations. Despite the fact that the dues structure was designed precisely to make sure those with the most money paid the highest rates, opposition to making it mandatory was framed in terms of not imposing it on the poorest members. As a result, a minority of members from all income brackets carried the weight of the organization while the majority paid their dues only when and if they felt like it. Organizational liberalism also contributed to a culture which effectively discouraged the sort of serious political debate that was a prerequisite for hammering out a political statement or strategy. Instead, there was a constant effort to deal with contradictions in the organization by finding compromise or consensus positions, even if those positions provided no real guidance for the organization. There was a consistent refusal to criticize ourselves or each other. Often, problems were only dealt with after they had gotten out of control. When members took on tasks for the organization, there was no effective mechanism to ensure that they were carried out. When the failure to carry out tasks was pointed out, this criticism was generally met with excuses rather than a serious evaluation of the problem. This common problem reached its most absurd proportions when the Michigan-based Coordinating Committee, the day-to-day decision-making body of the Federation between annual conferences, failed to meet once in the last year, while its members engaged in factional activity.

No Leadership Development

Anarchism tends to assume a theoretical posture of total hostility towards leadership. But every anarchist group or project that lasts any length of time has clearly identifiable, if informal, leadership. Some groups deny what is obvious to outside observers. Others grudgingly concede the truth, but only to say they are fighting against the problem. Love and Rage did both. The fact of leadership in organizations and movements creates problems. A position of leadership is in some sense unavoidably a position of authority. As anti-authoritarians, we need to create systems that make leaders accountable to the broader body of people who make up a movement or organization. We must also develop a practice of leadership that consciously subverts those authoritarian tendencies, and assists in generalizing leadership skills among the people. The structure of Love and Rage did not allow for the fact that the organization had leaders. Our structure was exquisitely democratic in providing for the fullest participation by everybody in the decisions of the organization. The Coordinating

Committee, with responsibility for day-to-day decision-making, was conceived of mainly as an administrative body with no power to chart the course of the organization. The Federation Council was composed of delegates elected by locals who were expected to simply transmit the decisions of the membership. The result was a cumbersome process that was consistently unable to make decisions on time. Demonstrations and projects like speaking tours were finally endorsed a month or two after they were over! By failing to delegate real leadership responsibilities to these bodies, we only reinforced the power of the informal and therefore unaccountable leadership of the organization -- the people who took things into their own hands to make sure the work kept getting done. Our failure to confront the issue of leadership meant that we were never able to solve these problems. The generally accepted notion of our relationship to mass movements was that we would simply participate in them as equals, arguing for our politics but not seeking leadership. (A more sophisticated version of this conception is the notion of the "leadership of ideas" promoted by the tendency in anarchism known as the Platformists, after "The Platform of the Libertarian Communists.") This concept, while appealing, swept under the rug the real contradictions in our actual relationships with mass movements. Many members of Love and Rage played leadership roles, whether they were willing to acknowledge them or not, in building various mass organizations and coalitions including Anti-Racist Action, the Vermont Living Wage Campaign, and the Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM!) at CUNY. In all of these formations we fought for the maximum level of internal democracy and against a dependence on leaders. But as experienced activists with accumulated skills, access to resources, and an overarching social analysis, we consistently found ourselves fulfilling leadership functions in these movements. The insistence that all activists in these movements participated as equals contradicted reality. It also protected us from being held responsible for mistakes that we committed as leaders, and undermined any systematic development of leadership skills among new people. It is clear to us now that there can be no social revolution without some sort of organized revolutionary leadership. We still recognize that leadership has inherent authoritarian tendencies which tend to reproduce the oppressive structures of this society and which must be fought. We are opposed to any conception of leadership that grants special privileges to leaders. We believe that one of the primary functions of a revolutionary organization must be the development of effective, responsible, and accountable leadership. This means, in addition to our insistence on movement democracy, the ongoing and systematic political education and organizational skills training of its members, as well as the promotion of these same processes as broadly as possible within the mass movements.

Lack of Method

In the course of the debate that destroyed Love and Rage, two philosophies on the question of organizational method emerged. While both sides sought to emphasize the supposedly anti-authoritarian character of their theories, both drew on the works of decidedly authoritarian tendencies in Marxism. Several of the people who went on to found Fire by Night argued for what they described as the Zapatista theory of Mandar Obedeciendo or "leading by obeying," which shares much in common with Paolo Friere's ideas on pedagogy and the Maoist theory of the Mass Line. It attempts to address the inherent contradiction between the fact of leadership and the goal of the self-organization of the people. The basic principle is that the people learn by doing, and that

the germ of revolutionary consciousness exists in and finds constant expression in the experiences of the oppressed in struggle. This germ exists alongside all sorts of other ideas, including many reactionary ones. Revolutionaries should, in struggle with the people, draw out the revolutionary content in how they already understand their conditions, clarify it, and distinguish it from the reactionary ideas. Through the constant repetition of this process, a more fully developed revolutionary consciousness emerges that is the organic product of people's experiences in struggle. In contrast to this approach, several signers of WWB advocated the development of an Anarchist Transitional Program, as mentioned earlier. The advocates of a Transitional Program sought to depict the method of Mandar Obedeciendo as one of simply following the masses and upholding whatever they believed, in order to manipulate and gain leadership over the movement. The advocates of Mandar Obedeciendo argued that the idea of a tiny group developing a program that would supposedly become the revolutionary program of the masses, without the participation of the masses themselves in this process, was inherently vanguardist. From cradle to grave, these contradictory conceptions of organizing method coexisted in Love and Rage, so that we never overcame our confusion about what kind of organization we had. At times, Love and Rage followed the Trotskyist practice of re-writing the New York Times coverage of international news and then plugging in our instant anarchist analysis. At other times, we used the paper to draw out the lessons we were learning through our participation in various struggles. The lack of clarity about organizational method also led to a lack of clarity about the distinction between a mass organization and a revolutionary organization. Our attempts to develop new theory from the lessons of our mass work were not always rigorous. This further blurred the distinction as members of the organization rightly asked what Love and Rage had to offer that they weren't getting in their mass work.

Theoretical and Practical Weaknesses of Anarchism

The debates that destroyed Love and Rage began with a critique of the failure of anarchism to draw the right lessons from its historical defeats and failures. They ended with a number of people in the organization doubting the viability of anarchism as a theoretical framework for revolutionary politics in the 21st century, in some cases to the point of saying they were no longer anarchists. The final test of any system of ideas is the results it produces in practice. We hold Christianity responsible for the Crusades, the witch hunts, and the intolerance of contemporary fundamentalism. We hold Leninism responsible for mass starvation resulting from forced collectivization in the Soviet Union and China, as well as for the anti-democratic practices of various Leninist groups today. Similarly, anarchism must be judged by its results. Anarchism has had its brief moments as a serious revolutionary movement, but they have been few and have all gone down to defeat. Anarchism has been almost completely marginalized for over half a century and shows no real signs of emerging from its current semi-comatose condition. Revolutionary theory must be a living and vibrant body of ideas in constant contact with the actual struggles of oppressed people. Despite the best efforts of ourselves and others, this does not describe contemporary anarchism. This is not to suggest that anarchism has nothing to offer. Many of us have identified as anarchists for many years, and our politics continue to owe a great deal to anarchism. We believe that the reproduction of the authoritarian relations of this society within our movements,

and in a new society, is one of the primary dangers confronting the revolutionary project. We do not currently see any other existing body of theory and practice as adequately answering our questions. If we want to develop a revolutionary politics that can fight for and win real human liberation in the 21st century, we must ruthlessly attack the flaws in all existing revolutionary theory and search for the ideas that can be used. Leaving aside the question of whether anarchism can be reconceived in a way that answers the questions that arose in these debates, we will identify the weaknesses of anarchist theory and practice that contributed to Love and Rage's downfall.

Philosophical Idealism

The first of these weaknesses is philosophical idealism, or the construction of a theory of society on a basis of abstract ideas rather than on the empirical investigation of material reality. This use of the term "idealism" should not be confused with the popular use of the word to speak of people who fight for an ideal of a better society. In this sense, we are proudly idealists. As anarchists, we defined ourselves as anti-statists -- in other words, we viewed the state as inherently oppressive and as an instrument for the rule of a minority class. This is true, and can be supported with all sorts of evidence. But it does not help us figure out how to build directly democratic instruments of self-governance under conditions of social collapse, or to carry out the transition to a truly free society. In a revolutionary situation, the people will have to nationalize an economy, provide reparations to oppressed nations, repress counter-revolutionaries, equalize healthcare, coordinate an army, and figure out how to do all this efficiently without building a new oppressive state. What will we do with white neighborhoods like Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, which has traditionally greeted Black people who venture into the neighborhood with racist violence? Do we force them at gunpoint to integrate, try using the Mass Line to struggle with them, or let them have autonomous self-determination? What we need is a theory of the state that starts with an empirical investigation of the origins of the state, the state as it actually exists today, the various experiences of revolutionary dual power, and post-revolutionary societies. We expect such a theory would confirm the anarchist hostility to the state as an instrument for human liberation, but we also expect that it would challenge the simplistic way that anarchists treat the question of the state. Why did pre-state societies consistently give birth to or find themselves conquered by state societies? Why does the state perform socially useful as well as repressive and exploitive functions? Are all states (monarchies, liberal democracy, one-party dictatorships) equal? Why have the brief modern experiences of revolutionary self-government (the Paris Commune, the Soviets and Workers Councils, the original Zapatistas in the Mexican Revolution, the Spanish Revolution) all gone down so quickly to defeat? These questions can only be answered after a serious investigation of the historical experience. Love and Rage never systematically undertook that investigation, but instead fell back on the formulaic responses of anarchist orthodoxy.

Moralism

Anarchism exists more as an ethical posture than a developed political theory. This is both a virtue and a vice. Anarchism's insistence on the ethical dimension of the society we are fighting for and the way we fight for it contrasts starkly with the repeated apologies for the repression of basic democratic rights, forced collectivization, and mass

murder in the name of progress and "scientific" socialism. To acknowledge that the new society will inevitably bear some of the marks of the old, does not mean anything goes. The flip side of this is anarchism's persistent tendency to substitute a moral posture for a strategic political perspective. Ethical principles tend to offer better guidance on what not to do than on what to do. In Love and Rage, political positions were often not judged not on terms of their validity, but on their appeal to righteousness. This led to an over-eager embrace of the most strident formulations and a tendency to shut down debate when issues got complicated. The persistent refusal of the anarchist movement as a whole to learn any serious lessons from its defeats suggests to us the deep-rootedness of these theoretical weaknesses.

PART 3: THE LEFT NEXT TIME

Global capitalism has entered into a new period marked by a dramatic increase in the global integration of the economy, and an all-out war on the poor that has sought to roll back all of the gains of the various social movements of the past century. Resistance to the new world order breaks out every day, in every corner of the globe, and the potential for more resistance is immense. At the same time, the organized left has never been weaker. There is a crying need for a reinvigorated revolutionary left that is able to incorporate the lessons of the past century and respond creatively to the challenges of the next one. The left we need must be radically democratic, by which we mean there must be a break with the authoritarian and anti-democratic practices widely associated with Leninism. The left we need must be multi-racial, which means it must fully incorporate the insights and demands of the oppressed nationality movements, and must have leadership that is rooted in these movements. The left we need must be feminist. It must integrate an understanding of patriarchy as a historic and contemporary reality, and use the practices of feminist process developed by the women's movement. Women must be in real leadership, and not just as tokens. The left we need must uphold queer liberation and must include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered leadership. The left we need must be independent of the capitalist political parties and institutions, and based in the communities of oppressed people. The left we need must be a true expression of the self-organization of the oppressed. In a revolutionary situation, it must be able to make use of the intellectual skills of individuals trained in political theory or economic planning without giving up the people's collective power to these individuals and creating a new ruling class. The precedents for the kind of left we need are few. But across the US and around the world, we see glimmers of it. We take particular inspiration from the Zapatistas in Mexico and the emerging international movement against neoliberalism that their example and prodding has inspired. We recognize that the Zapatistas are a new force, and do not imagine that they have all the answers. However, they have been able to overcome many of the sectarian divisions of the old left and reconceive the revolutionary project on a radical democratic foundation. Under conditions of siege by the Mexican Army, the EZLN has carried out decisions directly made by every woman, child and man in the indigenous villages that support it. While consensus decision-making on such a broad scale may not work in large cites, we can learn from the Zapatistas how important it is for a revolutionary movement to earn the support of its communities every step that it takes. The Fire by Night Organizing Committee is a product of the historical experiences

of Love and Rage. We see the failure of anarchism in general and of Love and Rage in particular as part of the general failure of the revolutionary left in the 20th century. We believe that anarchism and the broader libertarian socialist tradition offer crucial insights into the failure of the state socialist experiences that must be integrated into any genuinely liberatory revolutionary politics in the 21st century. While we believe that the old categories that have historically divided the left are increasingly obsolete, and we repudiate the sectarianism of all tendencies on the left, we do not believe that we can simply put history behind us and all agree to get along. The construction of a reinvigorated revolutionary left will require, among other things, grappling with the roots of the failures of every tendency on the left. It will require not just coming to agreement on a program, but also developing unity in practice through concrete common work.

Our Project

Fire by Night is a small organization committed to building an organized revolutionary left in the United States. We view our own organization as provisional, in the sense that we do not imagine that our small group is the nucleus of the organization we want to be a part of. In this sense, we regard all existing organizations on the left as provisional. None of them meet even the most basic criteria for the kind of organization that needs to be built. For our first year, we have taken on an intensive program of political study and training. To more fully understand the issues that destroyed Love and Rage, we have taken on detailed study sessions on the state, class structure, patriarchy and white supremacy. To research the historical failures of the revolutionary experiences of the 20th century, we are studying the Mexican Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the decolonization of Africa, the Cuban Revolution and Latin America, and the US in the 60s and 70s. With the aim of becoming more effective and well-rounded revolutionary organizers, we have planned topics on organizing method and organizational structure. We have committed ourselves to continued work in mass struggles, with a special focus on poor people's struggles and the student movement. Our local in the Bay Area works to organize tenants in public housing, who are fighting the city's plans to remove them to clear the way for gentrification. Our local in New York City continues to work with their comrades in CUNY, now to organize high school students, as well as their families and communities, to fight for access to public higher education. We are looking for people who share our perspective who want to work with us. We also want to develop relations with other revolutionary forces in the US -- to talk, to clarify and struggle over differences, and to see what sort of basis exists for common work. We believe that the creation of a vibrant revolutionary left in the United States will require a ruthless self-criticism of our failures to date. We have sought to make such a criticism of ourselves in these pages, and hope that our efforts in this direction will serve an example to others.

AFTERWORD

Today’s movements and future endeavors to build revolutionary organizations have much to learn from the experiences of organizations and revolutionary projects that have come before us. That is why we are publishing this pamphlet.

Today, many “cadre” or voluntary organizations, as opposed to non-profits, seem to have very limited life spans. If we are to make revolutionary change, this phenomenon pushes the question of organization to the forefront. But by summing up our experience and our critique of anarchism, we hope to have a bigger impact and to use our demise to contribute to organization-building and organizational theory.

Every former member will have slightly different assessments of what happened and why, however there are a number of things that we collectively agreed were fundamental contradictions. From those contradictions we find lessons to draw from our modest attempt at building a new revolutionary, non-sectarian, multi-tendency organization. First and possibly foremost was the tension between our political position on white supremacy, our beginnings as a small all-white organization, our position (not simply a desire) on becoming a multiracial organization, and white opportunist errors that we made. Related to that, although an obstacle that many organizations have overcome through hard work, is the problem of being a small organization with very large ambitions. Lastly is the relationship between “cadre” organizations and other left and community based organizations. Fire by Night, as a membership-only organization that demanded a high level of commitment and discipline of its members, existed at a time when cadre organizations were few and far between. This situation led to some members of FbN questioning their role in a cadre organization and its relationship with other organizations.

Fire by Night began in 1998 following the dissolution of Love and Rage. The founders of FbN determined that the organization would be a “provisional”, or temporary organization, until it was clear that there was the impetus and energy to truly embark on an organization-building project of greater caliber – one with a multi-racial/multi-national origin.

The first six months were spent primarily in discussions and studies to determine our organizing orientations (a clear point of unity from the beginning was that FbN would be an organization of organizers), structure and points of unity. It was a time of immense political development for the members, who were engaged in training, intensive studies and leadership development. Later came our organizing, which differed on each coast. In the San Francisco Bay Area, members worked with the Eviction Defense Network and the North Beach Public Housing Tenants Union. These two organizations were involved in a fight to stop the displacement of public housing tenants from North Beach, a neighborhood in San Francisco which was of great value to the tenants and, unfortunately, also of enormous financial value to developers and city officials. FbNers in New York continued their work from their time in Love & Rage, working in the student movement and specifically around campaigns to preserve open admissions with the Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM) at Hunter College.

In August of 1999 FbN met in the Bay Area to develop a more formal structure, discuss and agree on an analysis of the current period, strategic tasks for the left and FbN, and determine three-year goals related to organizing, recruitment and internal development. We also completed the Fire by Night Points of Unity, the first public document of the organization. We came out of our week of discussions with a very specific and ambitious plan for moving forward as an organization.

And move forward we did. Slowly but surely we began implementing our plans around organizational development, and organizing, primarily in student movements on the east and west coasts. We began to put into action our plan of initiating a national

student organizer training institute. This project later came to be known as Study & Struggle: Student Organizer Training Institute.

In January of 2000 the newly formed Organizing Committee of Study & Struggle came together to discuss the project and a timeline for implementing the project. The Organizing Committee was made up of students as well as former student organizers, with more than half of the committee made up of people not in Fire by Night. FbN felt strongly that the project should have a truly independent character, with no particular organization controlling the project. However, by initiating and having heavy involvement in its organizing, the project was in effect a FbN project. That could have changed over time, as the committee and its members' commitments to the project developed, but at that early stage, it was an FbN-conceived and –organized project.

The people that were approached to be on the Organizing Committee were contacts that we had through our previous organizing experiences. They were also in organizations, although we approached them primarily as individuals and not as representatives of organizations. That initially was due to wanting to keep Study & Struggle an independent project, but upon reflection was also motivated by our specific FbN organizational goals and desires. We wanted the project to be a success and we wanted FbN, as a major player in the project, to gain a reputation as a tight, together organization that could pull off something like this.

FbN made some very real errors in the formation of the Study & Struggle Organizing Committee. The primary error was in relationship to SLAM, one of the foremost people of color led, multi-racial student organizations in the country. Although SLAM should have been a major player in a project like Study & Struggle, FbN chose to approach individual members of SLAM, rather than the organization, seemingly to preserve the independence of Study & Struggle, but also to advance the goals of FbN. Many folks in SLAM were not aware of the project until the Organizing Committee meeting at Hunter College. This method of wanting to involve SLAM, but not respecting SLAM's organizational integrity and internal process, rightly upset many members of SLAM. They felt not only politically disrespected, but also hurt by FbN-people who were considered friends and comrades by many people in SLAM. The experience was also difficult for FbN, particularly the East Coast members. We were forced to painfully confront our own white opportunism and chauvinism. The experience set into motion a whole host of internal doubts about FbN, and the way in which we had gone about building revolutionary organization and the way in which we engaged in our organizing practice. Many of those doubts existed in one form or another prior to the crisis, however they were not brought forward and dealt with. The Study & Struggle crisis surfaced many important and hard questions about our direction and future as an organization.

In February of that year, the New York branch of Fire by Night decided to dissolve. The branch communicated this to the Bay Area members. They told us that the West Coast was free to do what we wanted with the organization and the name. We were very unhappy with New York's decision, but unclear about how to move forward as the only remaining "branch" of FbN. We eventually determined that we could not carry out a plan for a "national" organization, and decided to fold Fire by Night. However, for months following the dissolution, we remained as a small collective, continuing to organize and study together.

In a statement written shortly before the New York branch of FbN dissolved, they state, “Any time that a cadre-type organization like Fire By Night participates in mass struggles it must confront the contradictions that inevitably arise between the needs of the mass struggle and its own organizational goals.” Fire by Night engaged in a lot of principled work that played a small role in the overall movement for social justice. We felt that we were very conscious of past and present mistakes of organizations who put their own needs and goals ahead of the needs and goals of the movement. However, in the situation with Study & Struggle, we made the mistake of thinking too much of ourselves, and not enough of SLAM or larger questions of the multi-racial student movement.

Months after the dissolution of FbN, former West Coast members were approached by Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) to discuss joining FRSO. In May of 2000 we joined Freedom Road. Many folks may be asking how a group of people who came from such an anarchist background could have ended up in an organization like Freedom Road Socialist Organization. Much of that shift occurred in an analysis that developed while in FbN. As the New York branch statement notes, “Our turn away from anarchism and towards revolutionary socialism was in part the consequence of our participation in the CUNY movement and the realization of the crying need for a more serious and disciplined kind of revolutionary organization than was consistent with our previous anarchist outlook.”

Although we recognize the mistakes and contradictions of 20th century socialism, we also don’t think the baby should be thrown out with the bath water. The revolutionary socialist tradition provides a framework from which to analyze and fight for a just future society. Although we continue to hold some tenets of anarchism (open democratic processes and community building) as important, we do not believe that anarchism as a whole can provide the tools necessary to build a renewed revolutionary movement today. We hope that some of our conclusions are useful and relevant for future endeavors to build revolutionary organization, and we invite any thoughts about the content of this pamphlet. People learn through struggle and we learned a lot about organization building and practice from our experience in Love and Rage and Fire by Night.

Yours in Struggle,

Former Members of Fire by Night Organizing Committee

Especifismo: The Anarchist Praxis of Building Popular Movements and Revolutionary Organization in South America

by Adam Weaver

Throughout the world anarchist involvement within mass movements as well the development of specifically anarchist organizations is on the upsurge. This trend is helping anarchism regain legitimacy as a dynamic political force within movements and in this light, Especifismo, a concept born out of nearly 50 years of anarchist experiences in South America, is gaining currency world-wide. Though many anarchists may be

familiar with many of Especifismo's ideas, it should be defined as an original contribution to anarchist thought and practice.

The first organization to promote the concept of Especifismo—then more a practice than a developed ideology—was the *Federación Anarquista Uruguaya* (FAU), founded in 1956 by anarchist militants who embraced the idea of an organization which was specifically anarchist. Surviving the dictatorship in Uruguay, the FAU emerged in the mid-1980s to establish contact with and influence other South American anarchist revolutionaries. The FAU's work helped support the founding of the*Federação Anarquista Gaúcha* (FAG), the *Federação Anarquista Cabocla* (FACA), and the *Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro* (FARJ) in their respective regions of Brazil, and the Argentinean organization *Auca* (Rebel).

While the key concepts of Especifismo will be expanded upon further in this article, it can be summarized in three succinct points:

1. The need for specifically anarchist organization built around a unity of ideas and praxis.
2. The use of the specifically anarchist organization to theorize and develop strategic political and organizing work.
3. Active involvement in and building of autonomous and popular social movements, which is described as the process of "social insertion."

A Brief Historical Perspective

While only coming onto the stage of Latin American anarchism within the last few decades, the ideas inherent within Especifismo touch on a historic thread running within the anarchist movement internationally. The most well known would be the Platformist current, which began with the publishing of the "Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists." This document was written in 1926 by former peasant army leader Nestor Makhno, Ida Mett and other militants of the Dielo Trouda (Workers' Cause) group, based around the newspaper of the same name (Skirda, 192-213). Exiles of the Russian revolution, the Paris-based Dielo Trouda criticized the anarchist movement for its lack of organization, which prevented a concerted response to Bolshevik machinations towards turning the workers' soviets into instruments of one-party rule. The alternative they proposed was a "General Union of Anarchists" based on Anarchist-Communism, which would strive for "theoretical and tactical unity" and focus on class struggle and labor unions.

Other similar occurrences of ideas include "Organizational Dualism," which is mentioned in historical documents of the 1920's Italian anarchist movement. Italian anarchists used this term to describe the involvement of anarchists both as members of an anarchist political organization and as militants in the labor movement (FdCA). In Spain, the Friends of Durruti group emerged to oppose the gradual reversal of the Spanish Revolution of 1936 (Guillamon). In "Towards a Fresh Revolution" they emulated some of the ideas of the Platform, critiquing the CNT-FAI's gradual reformism and collaboration with the Republican government, which they argued contributed to the defeat of the anti-fascist and revolutionary forces. Influential organizations in the Chinese anarchist movement of the 1910's, such as the Wuzhengfu-Gongchan Zhuyi

Tongshi Che (Society of Anarchist-Communist Comrades), advocated similar ideas (Krebs). While these different currents all have specific characteristics that developed from the movements and countries in which they originated, they all share a common thread that crosses movements, eras, and continents.

Especifismo Elaborated

The Especifists put forward three main thrusts to their politics, the first two being on the level of organization. By raising the need for a specifically anarchist organization built around a unity of ideas and praxis, the Especifists inherently state their objection to the idea of a synthesis organization of revolutionaries or multiple currents of anarchists loosely united. They characterize this form of organization as creating an

> exacerbated search for the needed unity of anarchists to the point in which unity is preferred at any cost, in the fear of risking positions, ideas and proposals sometimes irreconcilable. The result of these types of union are libertarian collectives without much more in common than considering themselves anarchists. (*En La Calle*)

While these critiques have been elaborated by the South American Especifistas, North American anarchists have also offered their experiences of synthesis organization as lacking any cohesiveness due to multiple, contradictory political tendencies. Often the basic agreement of the group boils down to a vague, "least-common-denominator" politics, leaving little room for united action or developed political discussion among comrades.

Without a strategy that stems from common political agreement, revolutionary organizations are bound to be an affair of reactivism against the continual manifestations of oppression and injustice and a cycle of fruitless actions to be repeated over and over, with little analysis or understanding of their consequences (Featherstone et al). Further, the Especifists criticize these tendencies for being driven by spontaneity and individualism and for not leading to the serious, systematic work needed to build revolutionary movements. The Latin American revolutionaries put forward that organizations which lack a program

> which resists any discipline between militants, that refuses to 'define itself', or to 'fit itself', ... [are a] direct descendant of bourgeois liberalism, [which] only reacts to strong stimulus, joins the struggle only in its heightened moments, denying to work continuously, especially in moments of relative rest between the struggles (En La Calle).

A particular stress of the Especifismo praxis is the role of anarchist organization, formed on the basis of shared politics, as a space for the development of common strategy and reflection on the group's organizing work. Sustained by collective responsibility to the organizations' plans and work, a trust within the members and groups is built that allows for a deep, high-level discussion of their action. This allows the organization to create collective analysis, develop immediate and long term goals, and continually reflect on and change their work based on the lessons gained and circumstances.

From these practices and from the basis of their ideological principles, revolutionary organizations should seek to create a program that defines their short- and intermediate-term goals and will work towards their long-term objectives:

The program must come from a rigorous analysis of society and the correlation of the forces that are part of it. It must have as a foundation the experience of the struggle of the oppressed and their aspirations, and from those elements it must set the goals and the tasks to be followed by the revolutionary organization in order to succeed not only in the final objective but also in the immediate ones. (*En La Calle*)

The last point, but one that is key within the practice of Especifismo, is the idea of "social insertion." (1) It stems from the belief that the oppressed are the most revolutionary sector of society, and that the seed of the future revolutionary transformation of society lies already in these classes and social groupings. Social insertion means anarchist involvement in the daily fights of the oppressed and working classes. It does not mean acting within single-issue advocacy campaigns based around the involvement of expected traditional political activists, but rather within movements of people struggling to better their own condition, which come together not always out of exclusively materially-based needs, but also socially and historically rooted needs of resisting the attacks of the state and capitalism. These would include rank-and-file-led workers' movements, immigrant communities' movements to demand legalized status, neighborhood organizations' resistance to the brutality and killings by police, working class students' fights against budget cuts, and poor and unemployed people's opposition to evictions and service cuts.

Through daily struggles, the oppressed become a conscious force. The class-in-itself, or rather classes-in-themselves (defined beyond the class-reductionist vision of the urban industrial proletariat, to include all oppressed groups within society that have a material stake in a new society), are tempered, tested, and recreated through these daily struggles over immediate needs into classes-for-themselves. That is, they change from social classes and groups that exist objectively and by the fact of social relations, to social forces. Brought together by organic methods, and at many times by their own self-organizational cohesion, they become self-conscious actors aware of their power, voice and their intrinsic nemeses: ruling elites who wield control over the power structures of the modern social order.

Examples of social insertion that the FAG cites are their work with neighborhood committees in urban villages and slums (called Popular Resistance Committees), building alliances with rank-and-file members of the rural landless workers' movement of the MST, and among trash and recyclables collectors. Due to high levels of temporary and contingent employment, underemployment, and unemployment in Brazil, a significant portion of the working class does not survive primarily through wage labor, but rather by subsistence work and the informal economy, such as casual construction work, street vending, or the collection of trash and recyclables. Through several years of work, the FAG has built a strong relationship with urban trash collectors, called catadores. Members of the FAG have supported them in forming their own national organization which is working to mobilize trash collectors around their interests

nationally and to raise money toward building a collectively operated recycling operation. (2)

Especifismo's conception of the relation of ideas to the popular movement is that they should not be imposed through a leadership, through "mass line," or by intellectuals. Anarchist militants should not attempt to move movements into proclaiming an "anarchist" position, but should instead work to preserve their anarchist thrust; that is, their natural tendency to be self-organized and to militantly fight for their own interests. This assumes the perspective that social movements will reach their own logic of creating revolution, not when they as a whole necessarily reach the point of being self-identified "anarchists," but when as a whole (or at least an overwhelming majority) they reach the consciousness of their own power and exercise this power in their daily lives, in a way consciously adopting the ideas of anarchism. An additional role of the anarchist militant within the social movements, according to the Especifists, is to address the multiple political currents that will exist within movements and to actively combat the opportunistic elements of vanguardism and electoral politics.

Especifismo in the context of North American and Western Anarchism

Within the current strands of organized and revolutionary North American and Western Anarchism, numerous indicators point to the inspiration and influence of the Platform as having the greatest impact in the recent blossoming of class struggle anarchist organizations world-wide. Many see the Platform as a historical document that speaks to the previous century's organizational failures of anarchism within global revolutionary movements, and are moved to define themselves as acting within the "platformist tradition". Given this, the currents of Especifismo and Platformism are deserving of comparison and contrast.

The authors of the Platform were veteran partisans of the Russian Revolution. They helped lead a peasant guerilla war against Western European armies and later the Bolsheviks in the Ukraine, whose people had a history independent of the Russian Empire. So the writers of the Platform certainly spoke from a wealth of experience and to the historical context of one of their era's pivotal struggles. But the document made little headway in its proposal of uniting class struggle anarchists, and is markedly silent in analysis or understanding on numerous key questions that faced revolutionaries at that time, such as the oppression of women, and colonialism.

While most Anarchist-Communist oriented organizations claim influence by the Platform today, in retrospect it can be looked at as a poignant statement that rose from the morass that befell much of anarchism following the Russian Revolution. As a historical project, the Platform's proposal and basic ideas were largely rejected by individualistic tendencies in the Anarchist movement, were misunderstood because of language barriers as some claim (Skirda, 186), or never reached supportive elements or organizations that would have united around the document. In 1927, the Dielo Trouda group did host a small international conference of supporters in France, but it was quickly disrupted by the authorities.

In comparison, the praxis of Especifismo is a living, developed practice, and arguably a much more relevant and contemporary theory, emerging as it does out of 50 years of anarchist organizing. Arising from the southern cone of Latin America, but its influence spreading throughout, the ideas of Especifismo do not spring from any call-out or single document, but have come organically out of the movements of the global south that are leading the fight against international capitalism and setting examples for movements worldwide. On organization, the Especifists call for a far deeper basis of anarchist organization than the Platform's "theoretical and tactical unity," but a strategic program based on analysis that guides the actions of revolutionaries. They provide us living examples of revolutionary organization based on the needs for common analysis, shared theory, and firm roots within the social movements.

I believe there is much to take inspiration from within the tradition of Especifismo, not only on a global scale, but particularly for North American class-struggle anarchists and for multi-racial revolutionaries within the US. Whereas the Platform can be easily read as seeing anarchists' role as narrowly and most centrally within labor unions, Especifismo gives us a living example that we can look towards and which speaks more meaningfully to our work in building a revolutionary movement today. Taking this all into consideration, I also hope that this article can help us more concretely reflect on how we as a movement define and shape our traditions and influences.

[NOTE: This is the final version of the above article. A slightly different copy, we regret, appears in the print version of the Northeastern Anarchist, and may also be in electronic circulation. Please refer to this final version in any citations.]

Footnotes:

1. While "social insertion" is a term coming directly out of the texts of Especifismo influenced organizations, comrades of mine have taken issue with it. So before there is a rush towards an uncritical embrace of anything, perhaps there could be a discussion of this term.

2. Eduardo, then Secretary of External Relations for Brazilian FAG. "*Saudacoes Libertarias dos E.U.A.*" E-mail to Pedro Ribeiro. 25 Jun 2004

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Social Anarchism & Organisation: Concentric Circles

brazil/guyana/suriname/fguiana | anarchist movement | opinion / analysis
Thursday August 13, 2009 14:45 by Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro - FARJ

An excerpt from the FARJ programme "Anarquismo Social e Organização"

The specific anarchist organisation uses, both for its internal and external functioning, the logic of what we call "concentric circles" - strongly inspired by the Bakuninist organisational model. The main reason that we adopt this logic of functioning is because, for us, the anarchist organisation needs to preserve different instances of action. These different instances should strengthen its work while at the same time allowing it to bring together prepared militants with a high level of commitment and approximating people sympathetic to the theory or practice of the organisation - who could be more or less prepared and more or less committed. In short, the concentric circles seek to resolve an important paradox: the anarchist organisation needs to be closed enough to have prepared, committed and politically aligned militants, and open enough to draw in new militants. [Italiano]

Concentric Circles

Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro - FARJ

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organisation - who could be more or less prepared and more or less committed. In short, the concentric circles seek to resolve an important paradox: the anarchist organisation needs to be closed enough to have prepared, committed and politically aligned militants, and open enough to draw in new militants.

A large part of the problems that occur in anarchist organsations are caused by them not functioning according to the logic of concentric circles and by not implementing these two instances of action. Should a person who says they are an anarchist and is interested in the work of the organisation be in the organisation, despite not knowing the political line in depth? Should a laymen interested in anarchist ideas be in the organisation? How do you relate to "libertarians" - in the broadest sense of the term - who do not consider themselves anarchists? Should they be in the organisation? And the older members who have already done important work but now want to be close, but not to engage in the permanent activities of the organisation? And those that can only rarely dedicate time for activism? There are many questions. Other problems occur because there are doubts about the implementation of social work. Must the organisation present itself as an anarchist organisation in the social movements? In its social work can it form alliances with other individuals, groups and organisations that are not anarchist? In such a case, what are the common points to advocate? How do you carry out social work in a field with people from different ideologies and maintain an anarchist identity? How do you ensure that anarchism does not lose its identity when in contact with social movements? On this point there are also many questions.

The concentric circles are intended to provide a clear place for each of the militants and sympathisers of the organization. In addition, they seek to facilitate and strengthen the social work of the anarchist organisation, and finally, establish a channel for the capture of new militants.

In practice, the logic of concentric circles is established as follows. Inside the specific anarchist organisation there are only anarchists that, to a greater or lesser extent, are able to elaborate, reproduce and apply the political line of the organisation internally, in the fronts and in public activity. Also, to a greater or lesser extent, militants should be able to assist in the elaboration of the strategic-tactical line of the organisation, as well as having full capacity to reproduce and apply it. Militants assume internal functions in the organisation - be they executive, deliberative or extraordinary - as well as external functions with regards to social work. The functions assumed by the militants within the organisation adhere to self-management and federalism, or to horizontal decisions where all the militants have the same power of voice and of vote and where, in specific cases, there is delegation with imperative mandates. The functions to be performed by the delegates must be very well defined so that they "cannot act on behalf of the association unless the members thereof have explicitly authorised them [to do so]; they should execute only what the members have decided and not dictate the way forward to the association" [Luigi Fabbri. “A Organização Anarquista”. In: Anarco-Comunismo Italiano p. 124]. Moreover, the functions should be rotated in order to empower everyone and avoid crystallised positions or functions.

The specific anarchist organisation could have only one circle of militants, all of them being in the same instance, or it could have more than one circle - the criteria being collectively defined. For example, this may be the time that a person has been in the organisation or their ability to elaborate the political or tactical-strategic lines. Thus, the newer militants or those with a lesser ability to elaborate the lines may be in a more

external (distant) circle, with the more experienced militants with a greater ability for elaborating the lines in another more internal (closer) one. There is not a hierarchy between the circles, but the idea is that the more "inside", or the closer the militant, the better are they able to formulate, understand, reproduce and apply the lines of the organisation. The more "inside" the militant, the greater is their level of commitment and activity. The more a militant offers the organisation, the more is demanded of them by it. It is the militants who decide on their level of commitment and they do or do not participate in the instances of deliberation based on this choice. Thus, the militants decide how much they want to commit and the more they commit, the more they will decide. The less they commit, the less they will decide.

This does not mean that the position of the more committed is of more value than that of the less committed. It means that they participate in different decision-making bodies. For example, those more committed participate with voice and vote in the Congresses, which define the political and strategic lines of the organisation; the less committed do not participate in the Congresses, or only participate as observers, and participate in the monthly assemblies where the tactics and practical applications of the lines are defined.

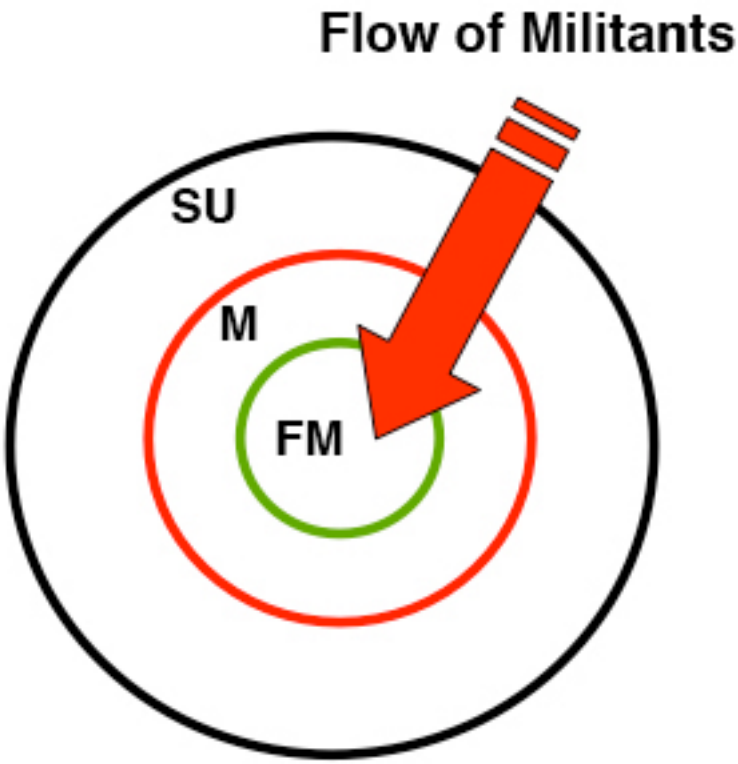
Thus, inside the specific anarchist organisation you may have one or more circles, which should always be defined by the level of commitment of the militants. In the case of more than one level this must be clear to everyone, and the criteria to change a level available to all militants. It is, therefore, the militant who chooses where they want to be.

The next circle, more external and distant from the core of the anarchist organisation is no longer part of the organisation, but has a fundamental importance: the level of supporters. This body, or instance, seeks to group together all people who have ideological affinities with the anarchist organisation. Supporters are responsible for assisting the organisation in its practical work, such as the publishing of pamphlets, periodicals or books; the dissemination of propaganda material; helping in the work of producing theory or of contextual analysis; in the organisation of practical activities for social work: community activities, help in training work, logistical activities, help in organising work, etc. This instance of support is where people who have affinities with the anarchist organisation and its work have contact with other militants, are able to deepen their knowledge of the political line of the organisation, better get to know its activities and deepen their vision of anarchism, etc.

Therefore, the category of support has an important role to help the anarchist organisation put into practice its activities, seeking to bring those interested closer to it. This approximation has as a future objective that some of these supporters will become militants of the organisation. The specific anarchist organisation draws in the greatest possible number of supporters and, through practical work, identifies those interested in joining the organisation and who have an appropriate profile for membership. The proposal for entry into the organisation may be made by the militants of the organisation to the supporter and vice-versa. Although each militant chooses their level of commitment to the organisation and where they want to be, the objective of the anarchist organisation is always to have the greatest number of militants in the more internal circles, with a greater level of commitment.

Let us give a practical example: lets suppose that an organisation has deliberated to work internally with two levels of commitment - or two circles. When the militants are

new they enter at the level of "militant" and, when they have been there six months and are prepared and committed militants, move on to the level of "full militant". Let us suppose that this organisation has resolved to have a level of supporters. The objective of the organisation will be to draw in the greatest possible number of supporters, based on the affinity of each one with the organisation, transfering them to the level of militant and, after six months - once prepared - to the level of full militant. We illustrate how this can work in practice.



SU being the level of supporters, M of militants and FM of full militants, the objective is the flow indicated by the red arrow - to go from SU to M and from M to FM. Those who are interested can follow this flow, and those who are not can stay where they feel better. For example, if a person wants to give sporadic support, and no more than that, they may want to always stay at SU. The issue here is that all a person's will to work should be utilised by the organisation. This is not because a person has little time, or because they prefer to help at a time when it must be rejected, but because inside a specific anarchist organisation there must be room for all those who wish to contribute. "The criteria for selection that never fails are the accomplishments. The aptitude and efficiency of the militants are, fundamentally, measures for the enthusiasm and the application with which they perform their tasks". [Juan Mechoso. *Acción Directa Anarquista* p.199.]

The logic of concentric circles requires that each militant and the organisation itself have very well defined rights and duties for each level of commitment. This is because it is not just for someone to make decisions about something with which they will not comply. A supporter who frequents activities once a month and makes sporadic contributions, for example, cannot decide on rules or activities that must be met or

carried out daily, as they would be deciding something much more for the other militants than for themselves.

It is a very common practice in libertarian groups that people who make sporadic contributions decide on issues which end up being committed to or carried out by the more permanent members. It is very easy for a militant who appears from time to time to want to set the political line of the organisation, for example, since it is not they who will have to follow this line most of the time.

These are disproportionate forms of decision-making in which one ends up deciding something which others enact. In the model of concentric circles we seek a system of rights and duties in which everyone makes decisions about that which they could and should be committed to afterwards. In this way it is normal for supporters to decide only on that in which they will be involved. In the same way it is normal for militants of the organisation to decide on that which they will carry out. Thus we make decisions and their commitments proportionally and this implies that the organisation has clear criteria for entry, well defining who does and does not take part in it, and at what level of commitment the militants are.

An important criteria for entry is that all of the militants who enter the organisation must agree with its political line. For this the anarchist organisation must have theoretical material that expresses this line - in less depth for those who are not yet members of the organisation and in more depth for those who are. When someone is interested in the work of the anarchist organisation, showing interest in approximation, you should make this person a supporter and give them the necessary guidance. As a supporter, knowing the political line in a little more depth and having an affinity for the practical work of the organisation, the person may show interest in joining the organisation or the organisation can express its interest in the supporter becoming a militant. In both cases the supporter should receive permanent guidance from the anarchist organisation, giving to them theoretical material that will deepen their political line. One or more militants who know this line well will discuss doubts, debate and make clarifications with them. Having secured the agreement of the supporter with the political line of the organisation, and with agreement from both parties, the militant is integrated into the organisation. It is important that in the initial period every new militant has the guidance of another older one, who will orient and prepare them for work. In any event, the anarchist organisation always has to concern itself with the training and guidance of the supporters and militants so that this may allow them to change their level of commitment, if they so desire.

This same logic of concentric circles works in social work. Through it, the anarchist organisation is articulated to perform social work in the most appropriate and effective way. As we have seen, the anarchist organisation is divided internally into fronts for the performance of practical work. For this there are organisations that prefer to establish direct relations with the social movements, and there are others that prefer to present themselves through an intermediary social organisation, which we could call a grouping of tendency.

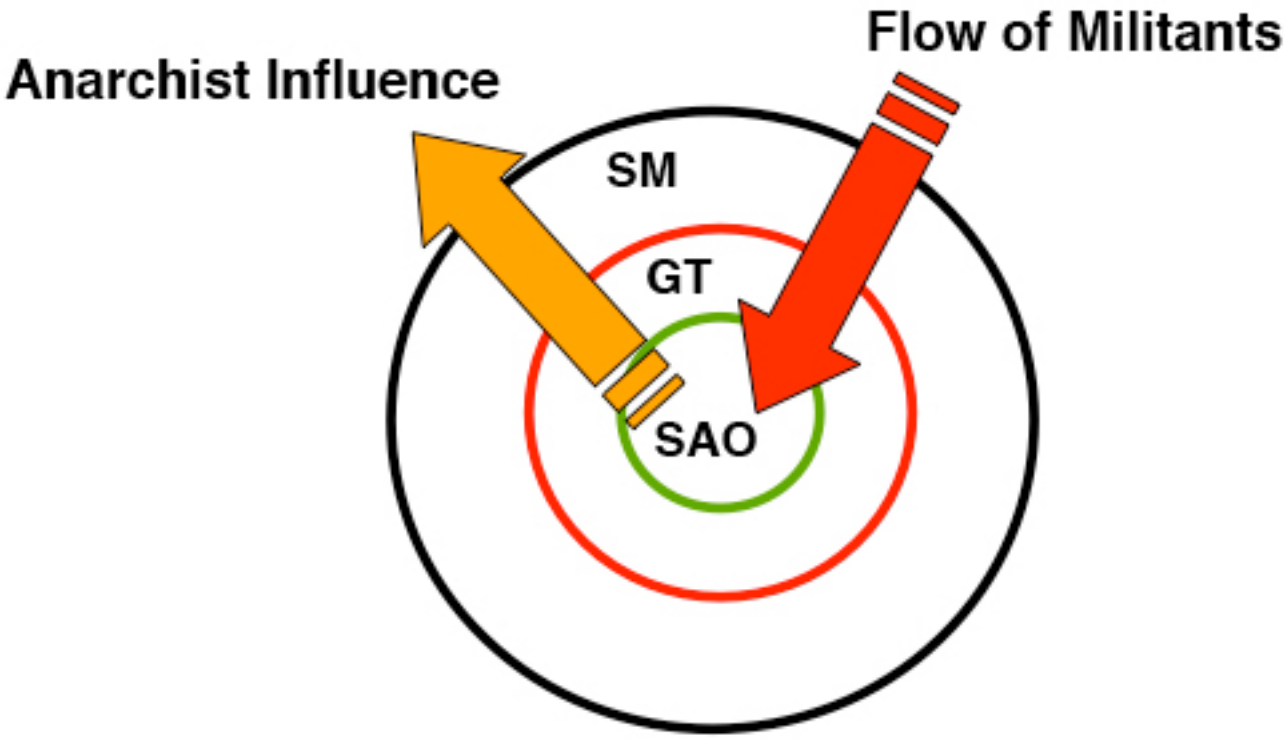
Participation in the grouping of tendency implies acceptance of a set of definitions that can be shared by comrades of diverse ideological origins, but which share certain indispensable exclusions (to the reformists, for example) if seeking a minimum level of real operational coherence. (...) The groupings of tendency, coordinated with each other

and rooted in the most combative of the people (...) are a higher level than the latter [the level of the masses]. [*Ibid.* pg 190,192.]

The grouping of tendency puts itself between the social movements and the specific anarchist organisation, bringing together militants of distinct ideologies that have affinity in relation to certain practical questions.

As we have emphasised, there are anarchist organisations that prefer to present themselves directly in the social movements, without the necessity of the groupings of tendency, and others preferring to present themselves by means of these. In both cases there are positive and negative points and each organisation must determine the best way to act. As the views that we advocate in the social movements are much more practical than theoretical, it may be interesting to work with a grouping of tendency, incorporating people who agree with some or all of the positions that we advocate in the social movements (strength, classism, autonomy, combativeness, direct action, direct democracy and revolutionary perspective) and that will help us to augment the social force in defence of these positions.

In the same way as in the diagram above, the idea is that the specific anarchist organisation seeks insertion in this intermediate level (grouping of tendency) and through it presents itself, conducting its work in social movements in search of social insertion. Again we illustrate how this works in practice.



SAO being the specific anarchist organisation, GT the grouping of tendency and SM the social movement, there are two flows.

The first - that of the influence of the SAO - seeks to go to the GT and from there to the SM. Let us look at a few practical examples. The anarchist organisation that desires to act in a union may form a grouping of tendency with other activists from the union movement who defend some specific banners (revolutionary perspective, direct action,

etc.) and by means of this tendency may influence the union movement, or the union in which it acts. Or the anarchist organisation may choose to work with the landless movement and, for this, brings people who defend similar positions (autonomy, direct democracy, etc.) in the social movement together in a grouping of tendency. By means of this grouping of tendency the specific anarchist organisation acts within the landless movement and, in this way, seeks to influence it.

This form of organisation aims to solve a very common problem that we find in activism. For example, when we know very dedicated activists; revolutionaries that advocate self-management, autonomy, grassroots democracy, direct democracy, etc. and with whom we do not act because they are not anarchists. These activists could work with the anarchists in the groupings of tendency and defend their positions in the social movements together.

The second arrow in the diagram shows the objective of the flow of militants. That is, in this scheme of work, the goal is to bring people in the social movements that have practical affinity with the anarchists into the groupings of tendency and, from there, bring those that have ideological affinity closer to the anarchist organisation. In the same way as in the previous diagram, if a militant has great practical affinity with the anarchists, but is not an anarchist, they must be a member of the grouping of tendency and will be fundamental to the achievement of social work. If they have ideological affinities, they may be closer to or even join the organisation.

The objective of the anarchist organisation is not to turn all activists into anarchists, but to learn to work with each of these activists in the most appropriate way. While having mutual interests the militants may change their positions in the circles (from the social movement to the grouping of tendency or from the grouping of tendency to the anarchist organisation). Without these mutual interests, however, each one acts where they think it more pertinent.

This article is an excerpt from Anarquismo Social e Organização.

Chapter 5: ***Trotskyism***

The Transitional Program

(Part 1)

The Objective Prerequisites for a Socialist Revolution

The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.

The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth. Conjunctural crises under the conditions of the social crisis of the whole capitalist system inflict ever heavier deprivations and sufferings upon the masses. Growing unemployment, in its turn, deepens the financial crisis of the state and

undermines the unstable monetary systems. Democratic regimes, as well as fascist, stagger on from one bankruptcy to another.

The bourgeoisie itself sees no way out. In countries where it has already been forced to stake its last upon the card of fascism, it now toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe. In the historically privileged countries, i.e., in those where the bourgeoisie can still for a certain period permit itself the luxury of democracy at the expense of national accumulations (Great Britain, France, United States, etc.), all of capital's traditional parties are in a state of perplexity bordering on a paralysis of will.

The "New Deal," despite its first period of pretentious resoluteness, represents but a special form of political perplexity, possible only in a country where the bourgeoisie succeeded in accumulating incalculable wealth. The present crisis, far from having run its full course, has already succeeded in showing that "New Deal" politics, like Popular Front politics in France, opens no new exit from the economic blind alley.

International relations present no better picture. Under the increasing tension of capitalist disintegration, imperialist antagonisms reach an impasse at the height of which separate clashes and bloody local disturbances (Ethiopia, Spain, the Far East, Central Europe) must inevitably coalesce into a conflagration of world dimensions. The bourgeoisie, of course, is aware of the mortal danger to its domination represented by a new war. But that class is now immeasurably less capable of averting war than on the eve of 1914.

All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet "ripened" for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only "ripened"; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.

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The Proletariat and its Leadership

The economy, the state, the politics of the bourgeoisie and its international relations are completely blighted by a social crisis, characteristic of a prerevolutionary state of society. The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the prerevolutionary into a revolutionary state is the opportunist character of proletarian leadership: its petty bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and its perfidious connection with it even in its death agony.

In all countries the proletariat is racked by a deep disquiet. The multimillioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines.

The Spanish proletariat has made a series of heroic attempts since April 1931 to take power in its hands and guide the fate of society. However, its own parties (Social Democrats, Stalinists, Anarchists, POUMists) – each in its own way acted as a brake and thus prepared Franco's triumphs.

In France, the great wave of "sit down" strikes, particularly during June 1936, revealed the wholehearted readiness of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist

system. However, the leading organizations (Socialists, Stalinists, Syndicalists) under the label of the Popular Front succeeded in canalizing and damming, at least temporarily, the revolutionary stream.

The unprecedented wave of sit down strikes and the amazingly rapid growth of industrial unionism in the United States (the CIO) is the most indisputable expression of the instinctive striving of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed on them by history. But here. too, the leading political organizations, including the newly created CIO, do everything possible to keep in check and paralyze the revolutionary pressure of the masses.

The definite passing over of the Comintern to the side of bourgeois order, its cynically counterrevolutionary role throughout the world, particularly in Spain, France, the United States and other "democratic" countries, created exceptional supplementary difficulties for the world proletariat. Under the banner of the October Revolution, the conciliatory politics practiced by the "People's Front" doom the working class to impotence and clear the road for fascism.

"People's Fronts" on the one hand – fascism on the other: these are the last political resources of imperialism in the struggle against the proletarian revolution. From the historical point of view, however, both these resources are stopgaps. The decay of capitalism continues under the sign of the Phrygian cap in France as under the sign of the swastika in Germany. Nothing short of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie can open a road out.

The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second, by the treacherous politics of the old workers' organizations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus. No matter how the methods of the social betrayers differ – from the "social" legislation of Blum to the judicial frame-ups of Stalin – they will never succeed in breaking the revolutionary will of the proletariat. As time goes on, their desperate efforts to hold back the wheel of history will demonstrate more clearly to the masses that the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind's culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.

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The Minimum Program and

the Transitional Program

The strategic task of the next period – prerevolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization – consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation . It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.

Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the *minimum program* which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum program* which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum program no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need of such a bridge, since the word *socialism* is used only for holiday speechifying. The Comintern has set out to follow the path of Social Democracy in an epoch of decaying capitalism: when, in general, there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of he masses' living standards; when every serious demand of the proletariat and even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state.

The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. Its political aim is the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie. However, the achievement of this strategic task is unthinkable without the most considered attention to all, even small and partial, questions of tactics. All sections of the proletariat, all its layers, occupations and groups should be drawn into the revolutionary movement. The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution.

The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old "minimal" demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old, partial, "minimal" demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism – and this occurs at each step – the Fourth International advances a system of *transitional demands*, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old "minimal program" is superseded by the *transitional program*, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution.

"Business Secrets" and

Workers' Control of Industry

Liberal capitalism, based upon competition and free trade, has completely receded into the past. Its successor, monopolistic capitalism not only does not mitigate the anarchy of the market, but on the contrary imparts to it a particularly convulsive character. The necessity of "controlling" economy, of placing state "guidance" over industry and of "planning" is today recognized – at least in words – by almost all current bourgeois and petty bourgeois tendencies, from fascist to Social Democratic. With the fascists, it is manly a question of "planned" plundering of the people for military purposes. The Social Democrats prepare to drain the ocean of anarchy with spoonfuls of bureaucratic "planning." Engineers and professors write articles about "technocracy." In

their cowardly experiments in "regulation," democratic governments run head-on into the invincible sabotage of big capital.

The actual relationship existing between the exploiters and the democratic "controllers" is best characterized by the fact that the gentlemen "reformers" stop short in pious trepidation before the threshold of the trusts and their business "secrets." Here the principle of "non-interference" with business dominates. The accounts kept between the individual capitalist and society remain the secret of the capitalist: they are not the concern of society. The motivation offered for the principle of business "secrets" is ostensibly, as in the epoch of liberal capitalism, that of free competition." In reality, the trusts keep no secrets from one another. The business secrets of the present epoch are part of a persistent plot of monopoly capitalism against the interests of society. Projects for limiting the autocracy of "economic royalists" will continue to be pathetic farces as long as private owners of the social means of production can hide from producers and consumers the machinations of exploitation, robbery and fraud. The abolition of "business secrets" is the first step toward actual control of industry.

Workers no less than capitalists have the right to know the "secrets" of the factory, of the trust, of the whole branch of industry, of the national economy as a whole. First and foremost, banks, heavy industry and centralized transport should be placed under an observation glass.

The immediate tasks of workers' control should be to explain the debits and credits of society, beginning with individual business undertakings; to determine the actual share of the national income appropriated by individual capitalists and by the exploiters as a whole; to expose the behind-the-scenes deals and swindles of banks and trusts; finally, to reveal to all members of society that unconscionable squandering of human labor which is the result of capitalist anarchy and the naked pursuit of profits.

No office holder of the bourgeois state is in a position to carry out this work, no matter with how great authority one would wish to endow him. All the world was witness to the impotence of President Roosevelt and Premier Blum against the plottings of the "60" or "200 Families" of their respective nations. To break the resistance of the exploiters, the mass pressure of the proletariat is necessary. Only factory committees can bring about real control of production, calling in – as consultants but not as "technocrats" – specialists sincerely devoted to the people: accountants, statisticians, engineers, scientists, etc.

The struggle against unemployment is not to be considered without the calling for a broad and bold organization of *public works*. But public works can have a continuous and progressive significance for society, as for the unemployed themselves, only when they are made part of a general plan worked out to cover a considerable number of years. Within the framework of this plan, the workers would demand resumption, as public utilities, of work in private businesses closed as a result of the crisis. Workers' control in such case: would be replaced by direct workers' management.

The working out of even the most elementary economic plan – from the point of view of the exploited, not the exploiters – is impossible without workers' control, that is, without the penetration of the workers' eye into all open and concealed springs of capitalist economy. Committees representing individual business enterprises should meet at conference to choose corresponding committees of trusts, whole branches of industry, economic regions and finally, of national industry as a whole. Thus, workers'

control becomes a *school for planned economy*. On the basis of the experience of control, the proletariat will prepare itself for direct management of nationalized industry when the hour for that eventuality strikes.

To those capitalists, mainly of the lower and middle strata, who of their own accord sometimes offer to throw open their books to the workers – usually to demonstrate the necessity of lowering wages – the workers answer that they are not interested in the bookkeeping of individual bankrupts or semi-bankrupts but in the account ledgers of all exploiters as a whole. The workers cannot and do not wish to accommodate the level of their living conditions to the exigencies of individual capitalists, themselves victims of their own regime. The task is one of reorganizing the whole system of production and distribution on a more dignified and workable basis if the abolition of business secrets be a necessary condition to workers' control, then control is the first step along the road to the socialist guidance of economy.

Chris Harman

Party and Class

(Winter 1968/69)

From **International Socialism** (1st series), No.35, Winter 1968/69, pp.24-32.
This text has been published as a pamphlet in numerous editions.
It was also published in Tony Cliff *et al.*, **Party & Class**, London 1971 (and later editions).
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Few questions have produced more bitterness in Marxist circles than that of the relation between the party and the class. More heat has probably been generated in acrimonious disputes over this subject than any other. In generation after generation the same epiphets are thrown about – "bureaucrat", "substitutionist", "elitist", "autocrat".

Yet the principles underlying such debate have usually been confused. This despite the importance of the issues involved. For instance, the split between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks that occurred over the nature of the organisation of the party in 1903 found many of those who were to be on the opposite side of the barricades to Lenin in 1917 in his faction (for instance, Plekhanov), while against him were revolutionaries of the stature of Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. Nor was this confusion an isolated incident. It has been a continuous feature of revolutionary discussion. It is worth recalling Trotsky's remarks, at the second Congress of the Comintern, in reply to Paul Levi's contention that the mass of workers of Europe and America understood the need for a party. Trotsky points out that the situation is much more complex than this:

If the question is posed in the abstract then I see Scheidemann on the one side and, on the other, American or French or Spanish syndicates who not only wish to fight against the bourgeoisie, but who, unlike Scheidemann, really want to tear its head off – for this reason I say that I prefer to discuss with these Spanish, American or French comrades in order to prove to them that the party is indispensable for the fulfilment of the historical mission which is placed upon them ... I will try to prove this to them in a comradely way, on the basis of my own experience, and not by counterposing to them Scheidemann's long years of experience saying that for the majority the question has already been settled ... What is there in common between me and a Renaudel who excellently understands the need of the party, or an Albert Thomas and other gentlemen whom I do not even want to call 'comrades' so as not to violate the rules of decency? [1]

The difficulty to which Trotsky refers – that both Social Democrats and Bolsheviks refer to the "need for a party", although what they mean by this are quite distinct things – has been aggravated in the years since by the rise of Stalinism. The vocabulary of Bolshevism was taken over and used for purposes quite opposed to those who formulated it. Yet too often those who have continued in the revolutionary tradition opposed to both Stalinism and Social Democracy have not taken Trotsky's points in 1920 seriously. They have often relied on "experience" to prove the need for a party, although the experience is that of Stalinism and Social Democracy.

It will be the contention of this argument that most of the discussion even in revolutionary circles is, as a consequence, discussion for or against basically Stalinist or Social-Democratic conceptions of organisation. It will be held that the sort of organisational views developed implicitly in the writings and actions of Lenin are radically different to both these conceptions. This has been obscured by the Stalinist debasement of the theory and practice of the October revolution and the fact that the development of the Bolshevik Party took place under conditions of illegality and was often argued for in the language of orthodox Social Democracy.

The Social-Democratic View of the Relation of Party and Class

The classical theories of Social Democracy – which were not fundamentally challenged by any of the Marxists before 1914 – of necessity gave the party a central role in the development towards socialism. For this development was seen essentially as being through a continuous and smooth growth of working-class organisation and consciousness under capitalism. Even those Marxists, such as Kautsky, who rejected the idea that there could be a gradual transition to socialism accepted that what was needed for the present was continually to extend organisational strength and electoral following. The growth of the party was essential so as to ensure that when the transition to socialism inevitably came, whether through elections or through defensive violence by the working class, the party capable of taking over and forming the basis of the new state (or the old one refurbished) would exist.

The development of a mass working-class party is seen as being an inevitable corollary of the tendencies of capitalist development. "Forever greater grows the number of proletarians, more gigantic the army of superfluous labourers, and sharper the opposition between exploiters and exploited" [2], crises "naturally occur on an increasing scale" [3], "the majority of people sink ever deeper into want and misery" [4], "the intervals of prosperity become ever shorter; the length of the crises ever longer".

[5]This drives greater numbers of workers "into instinctive opposition to the existing order". [6] Social Democracy, basing itself upon "independent scientific investigation by bourgeois thinkers" [7], exists to raise the workers to the level where they have a "clear insight into social laws". [8] Such a movement "springing out of class antagonisms ... cannot meet with anything more than temporary defeats, and must ultimately win". [9] "Revolutions are not made at will ... They come with inevitable necessity." The central mechanisms involved in this development is that of parliamentary elections (although even Kautsky played with the idea of the General Strike in the period immediately after 1905-6). [10] "We have no reason to believe that armed insurrection ... will play a central role nowadays." [11] Rather, "it (parliament) is the most powerful lever that can be used to raise the proletariat out of its economic, social and moral degradation." [12] The uses of this by the working class makes "parliamentarianism begin to change its character. It ceases to be a mere tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie." [13] In the long run such activities must lead to the organisation of the working class and to a situation where the socialist party has the majority and will form the government. "... (The Labour Party) must have for its purpose the conquest of the government in the interests of the class it represents. Economic development will lead naturally to the accomplishment of this purpose." [14]

Not only did this perspective lay the basis for most socialist action throughout western Europe in the 40 years prior to the First World War, it also went virtually unchallenged theoretically, at least from the Left. Lenin's astonishment at the SPD's support for the war is well known. Not so often understood, however, is the fact that even Left critics of Kautsky, such as Rosa Luxemburg, had not rejected the foundations of the theory of the relation of the party to the class and of the development of class consciousness implied. Their criticisms of Kautskyism tended to remain within the overall theoretical ground provided by Kautskyism.

What is central for the Social Democrat is that the party *represents* the class. Outside of the party the worker has no consciousness. Indeed, Kautsky himself seemed to have an almost pathological fear of what the workers would do without the party and of the associated dangers of a "premature" revolution. Thus it had to be the party that takes power. Other forms of working-class organisation and activity can help, but must be subordinated to the bearer of political consciousness. "This 'direct action' of the unions can operate effectively only as an auxiliary and reinforcement to and not as a substitute for parliamentary action." [15]

The Revolutionary Left and Social-Democratic Theories

No sense can be made of any of the discussions that took place in relation to questions of organisation of the party prior to 1917 without understanding that this Social-Democratic view of the relation of party and class was *nowhere* explicitly challenged (except among the anarchists who rejected any notion of a party). Its assumptions were shared even by those, such as Rosa Luxemburg, who opposed orthodox Social Democracy from the point of view of mass working-class self-activity. This was not a merely theoretical failing. It followed from the historical situation. The Paris Commune was the only experience then of working-class power, and that had been for a mere two months in a predominantly petty-bourgeois city. Even the 1905 revolution gave only the most embryonic expression of how a workers' state would in

fact be organised. The fundamental forms of workers' power – the Soviets, the workers' councils – were not recognised. Thus Trotsky, who had been President of the Petrograd Soviet in 1905, does not mention them in his analysis of the lessons of 1905, **Results and Prospects**. Virtually alone in foreseeing the socialist content of the Russian revolution, Trotsky did not begin to see the form this would take.

Revolution is first and foremost a question of power – not of the state form (constituent assembly, republic, united states) but of the social content of the government. [16]

There was a similar omission in Rosa Luxemburg's response to 1905, **The Mass Strike**. Not until the February revolution did the Soviet become central in Lenin's writings and thoughts. [17]

The revolutionary Left never fully accepted Kautsky's position of seeing the party as the direct forerunner of the workers' state. Luxemburg's writings, for instance, recognise the conservatism of the party and the need for the masses to go beyond and outside it from a very early stage. [18] But there is never an explicit rejection of the official Social-Democratic position. Yet without the theoretical clarification of the relationship between the party and the class there could be no possibility of clarity over the question of the necessary internal organisation of the party. Without a rejection of the Social-Democratic model, there could not be the beginnings of a real discussion about revolutionary organisation.

This is most clearly the case with Rosa Luxemburg. It would be wrong to fall into the trap (carefully laid by both Stalinist and would-be followers of Luxemburg) of ascribing to her a theory of "spontaneity" that ignores" the need for a party. Throughout her writings there is stress upon the need for a party and the positive role it must play:

In Russia, however, the Social-Democratic Party must make up by its own efforts an entire historical period. It must lead the Russian proletarians from their present "atomised" condition, which prolongs the autocratic regime, to a class organisation that would help them to become aware of their historical objectives and prepare them to struggle to achieve those objectives. [19]

The task of Social Democracy does not consist in the technical preparation and direction of mass strikes, but first and foremost in the political leadership of the whole movement. [20]

The Social Democrats are the most enlightened, the most class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat. They cannot and dare not wait, in a fatalistic fashion with folded arms for the advent of the "revolutionary situation". [21]

Yet there is a continual equivocation in Luxemburg's writings on the role of the party. She was concerned that the leading role of the party should not be too great – for she identified this as "the prudent position of Social Democracy". [22] She identified "centralism", which she saw as anyway necessary ("the Social Democracy is, as a rule, hostile to any manifestation of localism or federalism" [23]) with the "conservatism inherent in such an organ (i.e. the Central Committee)". [24] Such equivocation cannot be understood without taking account of the concrete situation Luxemburg was really concerned about. She was a leading member of the SPD, but always uneasy about its mode of operation. When she really wanted to illustrate the dangers of centralism it was to this that she referred:

The present tactical policy of the German Social Democracy has won universal esteem because it is supple as well as firm. This is a sign of the fine adaptation of our

party to the conditions of a parliamentary regime ... However, the very perfection of this adaptation is already closing vaster horizons to our party.

Brilliantly prophetic as this is of what was to happen in 1914, she does not begin to explain the origins of the increasing sclerosis and ritualism of SPD, let alone indicate ways of fighting this. Conscious individualists and groups cannot resist this trend. For "such inertia is due, to a large degree to the fact that it is inconvenient to define, within the vacuum of abstract hypotheses, the lines and forms of non-existent political situations". [25] Bureaucratisation of the party is seen as an inevitable phenomenon that only a limitation on the degree of cohesion and efficiency of the party can overcome.

It is not a particular form of organisation and conscious direction, but organisation and conscious direction as such that limit the possibilities for the "self-conscious movement of the majority in the interests of the majority".

The unconscious comes before the conscious. The logic of history comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process. The tendency is for the directing organs of the socialist party to play a conservative role. [26]

There is a correct and important element in this argument: the tendency for certain sorts of organisations to be unable (or unwilling) to respond to a rapidly changing situation. One only has to think of the Maximalist wing of the Italian Socialist Party in 1919, the whole of the "centre" of the Second International in 1914, the Menshevik-Internationalists in 1917, or the KPD in 1923. Even the Bolshevik Party contained a very strong tendency to exhibit such conservatism. But Luxemburg, having made the diagnosis, makes no attempt to locate its source, except in epistemological generalities, or looks for organisational remedies. There is a strong fatalism in her hope that the "unconscious" will be able to correct the "conscious". Despite her superb sensitivity to the peculiar tempo of development of the mass movement – particularly in **The Mass Strike** – she shies away from trying to work out a clear conception of the sort of political organisation that can harness such spontaneous developments. Paradoxically this most trenchant critic of bureaucratic ritualism and parliamentary cretinism argued in the 1903 debate for precisely that faction of the Russian party that was to be the most perfected historical embodiment of these failings: the Mensheviks. In Germany political opposition to Kautskyism, which already was developing at the turn of the century and was fully formed by 1910, did not take on concrete organisational forms for another five years.

Considerable parallels exist between Luxemburg's position and that which Trotsky adheres to up to 1917. He too is very aware of the danger of bureaucratic ritualism:

The work of agitation and organisation among the ranks of the proletariat has an internal inertia. The European Socialist Parties, particularly the largest of them, the German Social-Democratic Party, hive developed an inertia in proportion as the great masses have embraced socialism and the morethese masses have become organised and disciplined. As a consequence of this, Social Democracy as an organisation embodying the political experience of the proletariat may at a certain moment become a direct obstacle to open conflict between the workers and bourgeois reaction. [27]

Again his revolutionary spirit leads him to distrust *all* centralised organisation. Lenin's conception of the party can, according to Trotsky in 1904, only lead to the situation in which:

The organisation of the Party substitutes itself for the party as a whole; then the Central Committee substitutes itself for the organisation; and finally the "dictator" substitutes himself for the Central Committee. [28]

But for Trotsky the real problems of working-class power can only be solved,

by way of systematic struggle between ... many trends inside socialism, trends which will inevitably emerge as soon as the proletarian dictatorship poses tens and hundreds of new ... problems. No strong "domineering" organisation will be able to suppress these trends and controversies ... [29]

Yet Trotsky's fear of organisational rigidity leads him also to support that tendency in the inner-party struggle in Russia which was historically to prove itself most frightened by the spontaneity of mass action. Although he was to become increasingly alienated from the Mensheviks politically, he did not begin to build up an organisation in opposition to them until very late. Whether he was correct or not in his criticisms of Lenin in 1904 (and we believe he was wrong), he was only able to become an effective historical actor in 1917 by joining Lenin's party.

If organisation does produce bureaucracy and inertia Luxemburg and the young Trotsky were undoubtedly right about the need to limit the aspirations towards centralism and cohesion among revolutionaries. But it is important to accept all the consequences of this position. The most important must be a historical fatalism. Individuals can struggle among the working class for their ideas, and these ideas can be important in giving workers the necessary consciousness and confidence to fight for their own liberation. But revolutionaries can never build the organisation capable of giving them effectiveness and cohesion in action comparable to that of those who implicitly accept present ideologies. For to do so is inevitably to limit the self-activity of the masses, the "unconscious" that precedes the "conscious". The result must be to wait for "spontaneous" developments among the masses. In the meantime one might as well put up with the organisations that exist at present, even if one disagrees with them politically, as being the best possible, as being the maximum present expression of the spontaneous development of the masses.

Lenin and Gramsci on the Party and the Class

In the writings of Lenin there is an ever-present implicit recognition of the problems that worry Luxemburg and Trotsky so much. But there is not the same fatalistic succumbing to them. There is an increasing recognition that it is not organisation as such, but particular forms and aspects of organisation that give rise to these. Not until the First World War and then the events in 1917 gave an acute expression to the faults of old forms of organisation did Lenin begin to give explicit notice of the radically new conceptions he himself was developing. Even then these were not fully developed. The destruction of the Russian working class, the collapse of any meaningful *Soviet* system (i.e. one based upon real workers' councils), and the rise of Stalinism, smothered the renovation of socialist theory. The bureaucracy that arose with the decimation and demoralisation of the working class took over the theoretical foundations of the revolution, to distort them into an ideology justifying its own interests and crimes. Lenin's view of what the party is and how it should function in relation to the class and its institutions, was no sooner defined as against older Social-

Democratic conceptions with any clarity than it was again obscured by a new Stalinist ideology.

Many of Lenin's conceptions are, however, taken up and given clear and coherent theoretical form by the Italian Antonio Gramsci. [30] What is usually ignored by commentators on Lenin is that throughout his writings are two intertwined and complementary conceptions, which to the superficial observer seem contradictory. Firstly there is continual stress on the possibilities of sudden transformations of working-class consciousness, on the unexpected upsurge that characterises working-class self-activity, on deep-rooted instincts in the working class that lead it to begin to reject habits of deference and subservience.

In the history of revolutions there come to light contradictions that have ripened for decades and centuries. Life becomes unusually eventful. The masses, which have always stood in the shade and therefore have often been despised by superficial observers, enter the political arena as active combatants ... These masses are making heroic efforts to rise to the occasion and cope with the gigantic tasks of world significance imposed upon them by history; and however great individual defeats may be, however shattering to us the rivers of blood and the thousands of victims, nothing will ever compare in importance with this direct training that the masses and the classes receive in the course of the revolutionary struggle itself. [31]

... We are able to appreciate the importance of the slow, steady and often imperceptible work of political education which Social Democrats have always conducted and always will conduct. But we must not allow what in the present circumstances would be still more dangerous – a lack of faith in the powers of the people. We must remember what a tremendous educational and organisational power the revolution has, when mighty historical events force the man in the street out of his remote garret or basement corner, and make a citizen of him. Months of revolution sometimes educate citizens more quickly and fully than decades of political stagnation. [32]

The working class is instinctively, spontaneously Social Democratic. [33]

The special condition of the proletariat in capitalistic society leads to a striving of workers for socialism; a union of them with the Socialist Party bursts forth with a spontaneous force in the very early stages of the movement. [34]

Even in the worst months after the outbreak of war in 1914 he could write:

The objective war-created situation ... is inevitably engendering revolutionary sentiments; it is tempering and enlightening all the finest and most class-conscious proletarians. A sudden change in the mood of the masses is not only possible, but is becoming more and more probable ... [35]

In 1917 this faith in the masses leads him in April and in August-September into conflict with his own party:

Lenin said more than once that the masses are to the Left of the party. He knew the party was to the Left of its own upper layer of "old Bolsheviks". [36]

In relation to the "Democratic Conference" he can write:

We must draw the masses into the discussion of this question. Class-conscious workers must take the matter into their own hands, organise the discussion and exert pressure on "those at the top". [37]

There is, however, a second fundamental element in Lenin's thought and practice: the stress on the role of theory and of the party as the bearer of this. The most well

known recognition of this occurs in **What is to be done** when Lenin writes that "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice." [38] But it is the theme that recurs at every stage in his activities, not only in 1903, but also in 1905 and 1917 at exactly the same time that he was cursing the failure of the party to respond to the radicalisation of the masses. And for him the party is something very different from the mass organisations of the whole class. It is always a vanguard organisation, membership of which requires a dedication not to be found in most workers. (But this does not mean that Lenin ever wanted an organisation only of professional revolutionaries. [39]) This might seem a clear contradiction. Particularly as in 1903 Lenin uses arguments drawn from Kautsky which imply that only the party can imbue the class with a socialist consciousness, while later he refers to the class being more "to the Left" than the party. In fact, however, to see a contradiction here is to fail to understand the fundamentals of Lenin's thinking on these issues. For the real theoretical basis for his argument on the party is not that the working class is incapable on its own of coming to theoretical socialist consciousness. This he admits at the second congress of the RSDLP when he denies that "Lenin takes no account whatever of the fact that the workers too have a share in the formation of an ideology" and adds that "... The 'economists' have gone to one extreme. To straighten matters out somebody had to pull in the other direction – and that is what I have done." [40]

The real basis for his argument is that the level of consciousness in the working class is never uniform. However rapidly the mass of workers learn in a revolutionary situation, some sections will still be more advanced than others. To merely take delight in the spontaneous transformation is to accept uncritically whatever transitory products this throws up. But these reflect the backwardness of the class as well as its movement forward, its situation in bourgeois society as well as its potentiality of further development so as to make a revolution. Workers are not automatons without ideas. If they are not won over to a socialist world view by the intervention of conscious revolutionaries, they will continue to accept the bourgeois ideology of existing society. This is all the more likely because it is an ideology that flavours all aspects of life at present and is perpetuated by all media. Even were some workers "spontaneously" to come to a fully fledged scientific standpoint they would still have to argue with others who had not.

To forget the distinction between the vanguard and the whole of the masses gravitating towards it, to forget the vanguard's constant duty of raising ever-wider sections to its own advanced level, means simply to deceive oneself, to shut one's eyes to the immensity of our tasks, and to narrow down these tasks. [41]

This argument is not one that can be restricted to a particular historical period. It is not one, as some people would like to argue, that applies to the backward Russian working class of 1902 but not to those in the advanced nations today. The absolute possibilities for the growth of working-class consciousness may be higher in the latter, but the very nature of capitalist society continues to ensure a vast unevenness within the working class. To deny this is to confuse the revolutionary *potential* of the working class with its present situation. As he writes against the Mensheviks (and Rosa Luxemburg!) in 1905:

Use fewer platitudes about the development of the independent activity of the workers – the workers display no end of independent revolutionary activity which you

do not notice! – but see to it rather that you do not demoralise undeveloped workers by your own tailism. [42]

There are two sorts of independent activity. There is the independent activity of a proletariat that possesses revolutionary initiative, and there is the independent activity of a proletariat that is undeveloped and held in leading strings ... There are Social Democrats to this day who contemplate with reverence the second kind of activity, who believe they can evade a direct reply to pressing questions of the day by repeating the word "class" over and over again. [43]

In short: stop talking about what the class as a whole can achieve, and start talking about how we as part of its development are going to act. As Gramsci writes:

Pure spontaneity does not exist in history: it would have to coincide with pure mechanical action. In the "most spontaneous" of movements the elements of "conscious direction" are only uncontrollable ... There exists a multiplicity of elements of conscious direction in these movements, but none of them is predominant ... [44]

Man is never without some conception of the world. He never develops apart from some collectivity. "For his conception of the world a man always belongs to some grouping, and precisely to that of all the social elements who share the same way of thinking and working." Unless he is involved in a constant process of criticism of his world view so as to bring it the coherence:

He belongs simultaneously to a multiplicity of men-masses, his own personality is made up in a queer way. It contains elements of the caveman and principles of the most modern advanced learning, shabby prejudices of all past historical phases, and intuitions of a future philosophy of the human race united all over the world. [45]

The active man of the masses works practically, but does not have a clear theoretical consciousness of his actions, which is also a knowledge of the world insofar as he changes it. Rather his theoretical consciousness may be opposed to his actions. We can almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness), one implicit in his actions, which unites him with all his colleagues in the practical transformation of reality, and one superficially explicit or verbal which he has inherited from the past and which he accepts without criticism ... (This division can reach the point) where the contradiction within his consciousness will not permit any action, any decision, any choice, and produces a state of moral and political passivity. [46]

... All action is the result of diverse wills affected with a varying degree of intensity, of consciousness, of homogeneity with the entire mass of the collective will ... It is clear that the corresponding, implicit theory will be a combination of beliefs and points of view as confused and heterogeneous. (If practical forces released at a certain historical point are to be) effective and expansive (it is necessary to) construct on a determined practice a theory that, coinciding with and being identified with the decisive elements of the same practice, accelerates the historical process in act, makes the practice more homogeneous, coherent, more efficacious in all its elements ... [47]

In this sense the question as to the preferability of "spontaneity" or "conscious direction" becomes that of whether it is:

preferable to think without having a critical awareness, in a disjointed and irregular way, in other words to "participate" in a conception of the world "imposed" mechanically by external environment, that is by one of the many social groups in which

everyone is automatically involved from the time he enters the conscious world, or is it preferable to work out one's own conception of the world consciously and critically. [48]

Parties exist in order to act in this situation to propagate a particular world view and the practical activity corresponding to it. They attempt to unite together into a collectivity all those who share a particular world view and to spread this. They exist to give homogeneity to the mass of individuals influenced by a variety of ideologies and interests. But they can do this in two ways.

The first Gramsci characterises as that of the Catholic Church. This attempts to bind a variety of social classes and strata to a single ideology. It attempts to unite intellectuals and "ordinary people" in a single organised world view. But it can only do this by an iron discipline over the intellectuals that reduces them to the level of the "ordinary people". "Marxism is antithetical to this Catholic position." Instead it attempts to unite intellectuals and workers so as to constantly raise the level of consciousness of the masses, so as to enable them to act truly independently. This is precisely why Marxists cannot merely "worship" the spontaneity of the masses: this would be to copy the Catholics in trying to impose on the most advanced sections the backwardness of the least.

For Gramsci and Lenin this means that the party is constantly trying to make its newest members rise to the level of understanding of its oldest. It has always to be able to react to the "spontaneous" developments of the class, to attract those elements that are developing a clear consciousness as a result of these.

To be a party of the masses not only in name, we must get ever-wider masses to share in all party affairs, steadily to elevate them from political indifference to protest and struggle, from a general spirit of protest to an adoption of Social-Democratic views, from adoption of these views to support of the movement, from support to organised membership in the party. [49]

The party able to fulfil these tasks will not, however, be the party that is necessarily "broadest". It will be an organisation that combines with a constant attempt to involve in its work ever wider circles of workers, a limitation on its membership to those willing to seriously and scientifically appraise their own activity and that of the party generally. This necessarily means that the definition of what constitutes a party member is important. The party is not to be made up of just anybody who wishes to identify himself as belonging to it, but only those willing to accept the discipline of its organisations. In normal times the numbers of these will be only a relatively small percentage of the working class; but in periods of upsurge they will grow immeasurably.

There is an important contrast here with the practice in Social-Democratic parties. Lenin himself realises this only insofar as Russia is concerned prior to 1914, but his position is clear. He contrasts his aim – a really iron strong organisation", a "small but strong party" of "all those who are out to fight" – with the "sprawling monster, the new Iskra motley elements of the Mensheviks".[50] This explains his insistence on making a principle out of the question of the conditions for membership of the party when the split with the Mensheviks occurred.

Within Lenin's conception those elements that he himself is careful to regard as historically limited and those of general application must be distinguished. The former concern the stress on closed conspiratorial organisations and the need for careful direction from the top down of party officials, etc.

Under conditions of political freedom our party will be built entirely on the elective principle. Under the autocracy this is impracticable for the collective thousands of workers that make up the party. [51]

Of much more general application is the stress on the need to limit the. party to those who are going to accept its discipline. It is important to stress that for Lenin (as opposed to many of his would-be followers) this is not a blind acceptance of authoritarianism. The revolutionary party exists so as to make it possible for the most conscious and militant workers and intellectuals to engage in scientific discussion as a prelude to concerted and cohesive action. This is not possible without general participation in party activities. This requires clarity and precision in argument combined with organisational decisiveness. The alternative is the "marsh" – where elements motivated by scientific precision are so mixed up with those who are irremediably confused as to prevent any decisive action, effectively allowing the most backward to lead. The discipline necessary for such a debate is the discipline of those "who have "combined by a freely adopted decision". [52] Unless the party has clear boundaries and unless it is coherent enough to implement decisions, discussion over its decisions, far from being "free" is pointless. Centralism for Lenin is far from being the opposite of developing the initiative and independence of party members; it is the precondition of this. It is worth noting how Lenin summed up the reasons for his battle for centralism over the previous two years in 1905. Talking of the role of the central organisation and of the central paper he says that the result was to be the:

creation of a network of agents ... that ... would not have to sit round waiting for the call to insurrection, but would carry out such regular activity that would guarantee the highest probability of success in the event of an insurrection. Such activity would strengthen our connections with the broadest masses of the workers and with all strata that are discontented with the aristocracy ... Precisely such activity would serve to cultivate the ability to estimate correctly the general political situation and, consequently, the ability to select the proper moment for the uprising. Precisely such activity would train all local organisations to respond simultaneously to the same political questions, incidents, and events that agitate the whole of Russia and to react to these "incidents" in the most rigorous, uniform and expedient manner possible ... [53]

By being part of such an organisation worker and intellectual alike are trained to assess their own concrete situation in accordance with the scientific socialist activity of thousands of others. "Discipline" means acceptance of the need to relate individual experience to the total theory and practice of the party. As such it is not opposed to, but a necessary prerequisite of the ability to make independent evaluations of concrete situations. That is also why "discipline" for Lenin does not mean hiding differences that exist within the party, but rather exposing them to the full light of day so as to argue them out. Only in this way can the mass of members make scientific evaluations. The party organ must be open to the opinions of those it considers inconsistent.

It is necessary in our view to do the utmost – even if it involves certain departures from tidy patterns of centralism and from absolute obedience to discipline – to enable these grouplets to speak out and give the whole Party the opportunity to weigh the importance or unimportance of those differences and to determine where, how and on whose part inconsistency is shown. [54]

In short, what matters is that there is political clarity and hardness in the party so as to ensure that all its members are brought into its debate and understand the

relevance of their own activity. That is why it is absurd, as the Mensheviks tried to do, and as some people still do, to confuse the party with the class. The class as a whole is constantly engaged in unconscious opposition to capitalism; the party is that section of it that is already conscious and unites to try to give conscious direction to the struggle of the rest. Its discipline is not something imposed from the top downwards, but rather something that is voluntarily accepted by all those who participate in its decisions and act to implement these.

The Social-Democratic Party, the Bolshevik Party and the Stalinist Party

We can now see the difference between the party as Lenin conceived it and the Social-Democratic party simultaneously envisaged and feared by Rosa Luxemburg and Trotsky. The latter was thought of as a party of the whole class. The coming to power of the class was to be the party taking power. All the tendencies within the class had to be represented within it. Any split within it was to be conceived of as a split within the class. Centralisation, although recognised as necessary, was feared as a centralisation over and against the spontaneous activity of the class. Yet it was precisely in this sort of party that the "autocratic" tendencies warned against by Luxemburg were to develop most. For within it the confusion of member and sympathiser, the massive apparatus needed to hold together a mass of only half politicised members in a series of social activities, led to a toning down of political debate, a lack of political seriousness, which in turn reduced the ability of the members to make independent political evaluations, increased the need for apparatus-induced involvement. Without an organisational centralisation aimed at giving clarity and decisiveness to political differences, the independence of the rank-and-file members was bound to be permanently undermined. Ties of personal affection or of deference to established leaders become more important than scientific, political evaluation. In the marsh, where no one takes a clear road, even if the wrong one, then there is no argument as to which is the right one. Refusal to relate organisational ties to political evaluations, even if done under the noble intention of maintaining a "mass party" necessarily led to organisational loyalties replacing political ones. This in turn entailed a failure to act independently given opposition from old colleagues (the clearest example of this tendency was undoubtedly Martov in 1917).

It is essential to understand that the Stalinist party is not a variant of the Bolshevik party. It too was dominated by organisational structures. Adherence to the *organisation* rather than to the politics of the organisation mattered. Theory existed to justify an externally determined practice, not vice-versa. Organisational loyalties of the apparatus are responsible for political decisions (the former relate in turn to the needs of the Russian state apparatus). It is worth noting that in Russia a real victory of the apparatus over the party required precisely the bringing into the party of hundreds of thousands of "sympathisers", a dilution of the "party" by the "class". At best politically unsure of themselves, the "Lenin levy" could be relied upon to defer to the apparatus. The Leninist party does not suffer from this tendency to bureaucratic control precisely because it restricts its membership to those willing to be serious and disciplined enough to take *political* and *theoretical* issues as their starting point, and to subordinate all their activities to these.

But does this not imply a very elitist conception of the party? In a sense it does, although this is not the fault of the party, but of life itself, which gives rise to an uneven development of working-class consciousness. The party to be effective has to aim at recruiting alt those it conceives of as being most "advanced". It cannot reduce its own level of science and consciousness merely in order not to be an "élite". It cannot, for instance, accept that chauvinist workers are "as good as" internationalist party members, so as to take account of the "self-activity" of the class. But to be a "vanguard" is not the same as to substitute one's own desires, or policies or interests for those of the class.

Here it is important to see that for Lenin the party is not the embryo of the workers' state – the Workers' Council is. The working class as a whole will be involved in the organisations that constitute its state, the most backward as well as the most progressive elements. "Every cook will govern." In Lenin's major work on the state, the party is hardly mentioned. The function of the party is not to be the state, but rather to carry out continual agitation and propaganda among more backward elements of the class so as to raise their self consciousness and self reliance to the pitch that they will both set up workers' councils and fight to overthrow the forms of organisation of the bourgeois state. The Soviet state is the highest concrete embodiment of the self-activity of the whole working class; the party is that section of the class that is most conscious of the world historical implications of this self-activity.

The functions of the workers' state and of the party should be quite different (which is why there can be more than one party in a workers' state). One has to represent all the diverse interests of all the sections – geographical, industrial, etc – of the workers. It has to recognise in its mode of organisation all the heterogeneity of the class. The party, on the other hand, is built around those things that unite the class nationally and internationally. It constantly aims, by ideological persuasion, to overcome the heterogeneity of the class. It is concerned with national and international political principles, not parochial concerns of individual groups of workers. It can only persuade, not coerce these into accepting its lead. An organisation that is concerned with participating in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism by the working class cannot conceive of substituting itself for the organs of direct rule of that class. Such a perspective is only available to the Social-Democratic or Stalinist Party (and both have been too afraid of mass self-activity to attempt this substitution through revolutionary practice in advanced capitalist countries). Existing under capitalism, the revolutionary organisation will of necessity have a quite different structure to that of the workers' state that will arise in the process of overthrowing capitalism. [55] The revolutionary party will have to struggle within the institution of the workers' state for its principles as against those with opposed ones; this is only possible because it itself is not the workers' state.[56]

This enables us to see that Lenin's theory of the party and his theory of the state are not two separate entities, capable of being dealt with in isolation from one another. Until he developed the theory of the state, he tended to regard the Bolshevik Party as a peculiar adaptation to Russian circumstances. Given the Social-Democratic (and later the Stalinist) conception of the party becoming the state, it is only natural for genuinely revolutionary and therefore democratic socialists not to want to restrict the party to the most advanced sections of the class, even if the need for such an organisation of the most conscious sections is recognised. This explains Rosa Luxemburg's ambiguity over

the question of political organisation and theoretical clarity. It enables her to counterpose the "errors committed by a truly revolutionary movement" to the "infallibility of the cleverest central committee". But if the party and the institutions of class power are distinct (although one attempts to influence the other) the "infallibility" of the one is a central component in the process by which the other learns from its errors. It is Lenin who sees this. It is Lenin who draws the lessons, not (at least until the very end of her life) Luxemburg. It is not true that "For Marxists in the advanced industrial countries, Lenin's original position can much less serve as a guide than Rosa Luxemburg's ..." [57] The need is still to build an organisation of revolutionary Marxists that will subject their situation and that of the class as a whole to scientific scrutiny, will ruthlessly criticise their own mistakes, and will, while engaging in the everyday struggles of the mass of workers, attempt to increase their independent self-activity by unremittingly opposing their ideological and practical subservience to the old society. A reaction against the identification of class and party elite made by both Social Democracy and Stalinism is very healthy. It should not, however, prevent a clear-sighted perspective of what we have to do to overcome their legacy.

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Notes

1. Leon Trotsky, **The First Five Years of the Communist International**, Vol.1, New York 1977, p.98.
2. Karl Kautsky, **The Erfurt Program**, Chicago 1910, p.8.
3. **ibid.**
4. **ibid.**, p.43.
5. **ibid.**, p.85.
6. **ibid.**, p.198.
7. **ibid.**, p.198.
8. **ibid.**, p.198.
9. Karl Kautsky, **The Road to Power**, Chicago 1910, p.24.
10. See Karl Kautsky, **Social Revolution**, p.45. Also Carl E. Schorske, **German Social Democracy 1905-1917**, Cambridge, Mass. 1955, p.115.
11. Karl Kautsky, **op. cit.**, p.47.
12. Karl Kautsky, **The Erfurt Program**, p.188.
13. **ibid.**, p.188.
14. **ibid.**, p.189.
15. Karl Kautsky, **The Road to Power**, p.95.
16. Leon Trotsky in **Nashe Slovo**, 17th October 1915. Quoted in Leon Trotsky, **Permanent Revolution**, London 1962, p.254.
17. e.g. Although these are referred to as "organs of revolutionary rule", in an important article on perspectives in **Sotsial-democrat** in 1915, they receive very little emphasis – references to them accounting for only five or six lines in an article of four pages.
18. *cf.* both **Organisational Questions of the Russian Social-Democracy** (published by her epigones under the title **Leninism or**

Marxism), and **The Mass-Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions**.

19. Rosa Luxemburg, **Leninism or Marxism**, Ann Arbor 1962, p.82. Interesting enough, Lenin, in his reply, does not concentrate on the question of centralism in general, but on factual mistakes and distinctions in Luxemburg's article.
20. Rosa Luxemburg, **The Mass Strike**, p.57.
21. **ibid.**
22. Rosa Luxemburg, **Leninism or Marxism**, p.92.
23. **ibid.**, p.85.
24. **ibid.**, p.94.
25. **ibid.**, p.93.
26. **ibid.**, p.93.
27. Leon Trotsky, **Results and Prospects** (1906), in **The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects**, London 1962, p.246.
28. Quoted in I. Deutscher, **The Prophet Armed**, London 1954, pp.92-93.
29. **ibid.**
30. Unfortunately there is no room here to deal with Trotsky's later discussion on these matters.
31. V.I. Lenin, **Revolutionary Days** (31st January 1905), in **Collected Works**, Vol.VIII, p.104.
32. V.I .Lenin, **Revolutionary Army and Revolutionary Government**, **ibid.**, p.564.
33. Quoted in Raya Dunyevskaya, **Marxism and Freedom**, New York 1958, p.182.
34. **ibid.**
35. V.I. Lenin, **The Collapse of the Second International,** in **Collected Works**, Vol.XXI, pp.257-8.
36. Leon Trotsky, **History of the Russian Revolution**, London 1965, p.981.
37. V.I. Lenin, **Collected Works**, Vol.XXVI, pp.57-58.
38. V.I. Lenin, **What is to be Done**, Moscow, n.d., p.25.
39. *q.v.* V.I. Lenin, **Collected Works**, Vol.VII, p.263.
40. V.I. Lenin, **Collected Works**, Vol.VI, p.491.
41. **ibid.**, Vol.VII, p.265.
42. **ibid.**, Vol.VIII,p.157.
43. **ibid.**, Vol.VIII, p.155.
44. Antonio Gramsci, **Passato e Presente**, Turin 1951, p.55.
45. Antonio Gramsci, **The Modern Prince and other Essays**, London 1957, p.59.
46. **ibid.**, pp.66-67.
47. Antonio Gramsci, **Il Materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce**, Turin 1948, p.38.
48. Antonio Gramsci, **The Modern Prince and other Essays**, p.67.
49. V.I. Lenin, **Collected Works**, Vol.VII, p.117.
50. **ibid.**, Vol.VIII, p.145.

51. **ibid.**, Vol.VIII, p.196.
52. V.I. Lenin, **What is to be Done**, p.11.
53. V.I. Lenin, **Collected Works**, Vol.VIII, p.154.
54. **ibid.**, Vol.VII, p.116.
55. For a naïve statement of the opposite view see **An Open Letter to IS Comrades**, Solidarity Special, September 1968.
56. Some confusion creeps into the argument because of the experience of Russia after 1918. The Important point, however, is that it is not the *form* of the party that produces party as opposed to Soviet rule, but the decimation of the working class. (See C. Harman, *How the Revolution Was Lost*, **IS 30**) Cliff makes this point in *Trotsky on Suhstitutionalism*, but for some unaccountable reason, also says that in Trotsky's early claims that Lenin's theory of organisation was "substitutionist", "one can see his prophetic genius, his capacity for looking ahead, to bring into a unified system every facet of life".
57. T. Cliff, **Rosa Luxemburg**, London 1959, p.54. Here again Cliff's desire to honour a great revolutionary seems to overcome a genuine scientific evaluation.>

Chapter 6: ***Post-Lenin Leninism***

Hal Draper

Anatomy of the Micro-Sect

(1973)

Unpublished document circulated privately in 1973. [1]
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The original subtitle [of this document] was: A Position Paper by the Independent Socialist Committee. *This was not a membership group but an educational and publishing agency.*

In its original form, the first page bore a long footnote explaining the paper's use of the term 'sect'. It is better presented here, as an introduction to the essay:

Introduction

There is a terminological problem. "Sect" is often used as a cuss-word to mean a group one doesn't like. "Movement" is often used to describe something that does not

exist in organized form; as when "the American socialist movement" is used as an abbreviation for scattered socialist elements that often do not "move" at all. We shall use these terms with more precise meanings. A sect presents itself as the embodiment of the socialist movement, though it is a membership organization whose boundary is set more or less rigidly by the points in its political program rather than by its relation to the social struggle. In contrast, a working-class party is not simply an electoral organization but rather, whether electorally engaged or not, an organization which really is the political arm of decisive sectors of the working class, which politically reflects (or refracts) the working class in motion as it is. A "socialist movement" sums up the mass manifestations of a socialist working class in various fields, not only the political, usually around a mass socialist party. For present purposes, the important distinction is between the sect form of organization and a form of organization common in other countries but which does not yet exist in this backward country.

This approach is basic to the paper, for essentially it deals with the question: Is there an alternative to the sect mode of organization which dominates the whole history of American socialism, past and present?

H.D.

About the Road to an American Socialist Movement

Since there are socialists in America but no socialist movement, it is understandable that the socialists will say, "Let us go and form a socialist movement." All considerations argue for this obvious step, and there are no arguments against it: except one. This is the fact – historical fact – that no one can decide to "make" a revolution. Whatever is formed by fiat will turn out to be a sect alongside the other sects, even if it is that better kind of sect which believes in not being sectarian.

Let us make clear from the outset that we do not have the answer to the $64 question, viz., a formula or gimmick which, if only followed, will infallibly produce a party or movement out of the woodwork. We will all have to grope for some time. But we have some conceptions about the direction in which to grope, and the criteria for deciding whether developments are hopeful or hindering.

1. The Road Forward

A socialist movement will become a possibility in this country, as it did in others, as its bases are matured by social-political conditions. If, however, it cannot be created simply by an effort of will, it is also historically true that it is not simply a matter of spontaneous generation. When the bases for a socialist movement mature, it will be difficult for it to come into being unless the nascent movement is crystallized with the help of active socialist elements. Every socialist movement has been the outcome of the fusion of spontaneity and leadership, of naturally developed elements and conscious organization.

This means that, for us American socialists today who look forward to the building of a genuine socialist movement, there is a course we can take which will further this objective and bring it nearer, which will fructify the ground on which it will arise, which will make it easier for its elements to mature from place to place. The alternative to

creation-by-fiat is not that we passively wait for it to arise by itself without the intervention of human hands.

It follows that the course taken now by American socialists can also have the opposite effect: of turning off dispositions toward a genuine movement; of sterilizing the ground on which the seeds of the movement might germinate; of making it harder for workers to find their way to a socialist movement-in-the-making.

Unfortunately, it is this latter course which today is dominant among the sects, sectlets, and micro-sects of what passes nowadays as American socialism. The sect form of American socialist groupment today is a roadblock in the way; and the sect notions that are dominant among this groupment constitute a poison which could immobilize and abort a socialist movement even if it got started.

2. Fragmentation

American socialism today has hit a new low in terms of sect fragmentation. There are more sects going through their gyrations at this moment than have ever existed in all previous periods in this country taken together. And the fragments are still fissioning, down to the submicroscopic level. Politically speaking, their average has dropped from the comic-opera plane to the comic-book grade. Where the esoteric sects (mainly Trotskyist splinters) of the 1930s tended toward a sort of super sophistication in Marxism and futility in practice, there is a gaggle of grouplets now (mainly Maoist-Castroite) characterized by amnesia regarding the Marxist tradition, ignorance of the socialist experience, and extreme primitivism. The road to an American socialist movement surely lies over the debris, or around the rotting off-shoots of, this fetid jungle of sects.

To be sure, we recognize that there are sects and sects: we still have with us some sects and sectlets of the "classic" type, i.e., mainly futile and fossilized, as distinct from the new crop of neo-Stalinist (Maoist-Castroite-etc.) sects that represent a more positive danger to any healthy development in the working-class movement. it is characteristic of the latter that they do not want a class movement – not because of some special organization conception but because of their basic political conceptions. Just as their "socialism" is the rule of a state despotism over a bureaucratically collectivized economy, so their organizational road to power is the formation of an elite band of Maximum Leaders which holds itself ready to bestow its own rule, at a propitious movement, on an elemental upsurge of the people. (This is new only in the sense of being a regurgitation, in new forms, of the oldest type of leftist movement, the Jacobin-putschist circles that dominated before the rise of Marxism.)

If these neo-Stalinist sects are "oriented" toward the working class – or toward the lumpenpoor, or the blacks, or the "third world", etc. – it is only in the sense that men in a hurry orient toward a pack of horses. They make clear that the historical content of "Maoism" in its different varieties is the conception of the bureaucratic revolution-from-above engineered by a band of self-appointed leaders riding on the back of a class movement, and bridling it; for which end, the most suitable class is one with a minimum of capacity for initiative and self-organization, such as a peasantry. These elements are – some for reasons of class makeup, enemies to the revolutionary democracy of socialism.

Hence also these elements need the sect form of organization. For them the sect is not an unfortunate necessity due to the absence of a real movement: it is their

movement. Minuscule size may not even be a drawback; for didn't Castro "make" the revolution with only umpteen good men? [1*] How many commissars are needed on the Long March? This indeed is part of the dynamic behind the current proliferation of sects, since they are not inhibited by the prejudice that a "party" needs much of a rank and file.

3. The Classic Sect

As for the "classic" type of sects still operating: these presently divide more or less into those that stem from the Trotskyist sect tradition and those that exemplify the social-democratic pattern. (To be sure, the Trotskyist grouplets shade off at one end into the neo-Stalinist type, particularly the larger sect called the Socialist Workers "Party", whose politics has steadily moved since Trotsky's death in the direction of Stalinization.)

What characterizes the classic sect was best defined by Marx himself: it counterposes its sect criterion of programmatic points against the real movement of the workers in the class struggle, which may not measure up to its high demands. The touchstone of support (the "*point d'honneur*," in Marx's words) is conformity with the sect's current shibboleths – whatever they may be, including programmatic points good in themselves. The approach pointed by Marx was different: without giving up or concealing one's own programmatic politics in the slightest degree, the real Marxist looks to the lines of struggle calculated to move decisive sectors of the class into action – into movement against the established powers of the system (state and bourgeoisie and their agents, including their labor lieutenants inside the workers' movement). And for Marx, it is this reality of social (class) collision which will work to elevate the class's consciousness to the level of the socialist movement's program.

To move a fighting sector of the class into action against the established powers by only a step is more important than "a thousand programs," Marx and Engels used to reiterate, and there's no use denouncing them for deprecating programmatic politics. To the sect mind, their approach is utterly incomprehensible. For over a century now, we have seen the two touchstone; and the difference is as glaring nowadays as it ever was. The most important test has always been the relationship of the self-styled Marxist and the working class organized on the elementary economic level, i.e., the trade-union movement. (The test is all the more decisive in the United States where, unfortunately, the trade-union movement is the only class movement of the workers in existence.)

4. Sects and Trade Unions

The sect-socialist [2*] has always felt a soul-torn difficulty in the face of a trade-union movement which rejects socialism; and the dominance of sect life in the history of socialism has been accompanied by the predominance of a leftist hostility to trade-unionism as such.

Marx and Engels constituted the first socialist school to hold a position supporting trade-unionism as such (while critical of given policies, leaders, etc., of course). And after their time, socialist history divides mainly between the social-democratic types who supported reformist trade-unionism precisely because they were themselves reformist rather than Marxist, and the would-be revolutionary socialists who found "revolutionary" arguments for returning to the old crap of socialist anti-trade-unionism

– with the addition of Marxistical rhetoric to dress up their sectist approach. Very few so-called or self-styled Marxists have understood the heart of Marx's approach to proletarian socialism: The basic strategy for building a socialist movement lies in fusing two movements – the class movement for this-or-that step which gets a decisive sector of the class into collision with the established powers of state and bourgeoisie, a collision on whatever scale possible; and the work of permeating this class movement with educational propaganda for social revolution, which integrates the two.

If this has been true in the best days of the Marxist movement to a greater or lesser extent, it took grotesque forms in the recent past of the American left, i.e., during the Sixties when the radical impulse was temporarily coming from non-worker sectors (students and some blacks not rooted in working-class life, for example). [3*] The student New Left commonly swallowed the image of Labor dished out by the sociological brainwashers of the academy: "Big Labor" alongside Big Business etc., identification of trade-unionism with George Meany or Hoffa, implicit equation of the trade-union movement with its bureaucracy, organized workers as an ipso-facto "middle class" stratum and part of the Establishment, and the rest of the ideological garbage from the real Establishment's anti-working-class mind mills.

Even among those New Left elements – the better ones – who oriented toward going to work in factories or plants ("going to the people"), the dominant conception was that trade unions as such had to be replaced with more "radical" formations of shop organization which would somehow be outside the trade-union structure without being a dual trade union. These conceptions either remained in the realm of fantasy while making it impossible for their holders to integrate themselves into the real movement as trade-union militants, or (worse) were acted out destructively in certain places, bringing harm to the workers and discreditment to the radicals. Nowhere did the New Left impulse into the factories eventuate in a more or less well-rooted movement of militants inside the trade-union movement that could really offer opposition to the established bureaucracy: this is its indictment.

The sectist approach to the class movement showed its pointed ears in many ways that need illustration. Here are two.

Item. The student radical, heart filled with sympathy for poor workers, turns to the Farm Workers' struggle as one clearly meriting his support. Typically he does not "go to the people" by going to work in the fields like other workers; for should his special talents be buried under a clod? He goes to work "for the union", i.e., as what the union calls a student volunteer. Impressed by his own self-sacrifice on the one hand, on the other he finds that the Farm Workers union scarcely measures up to his ideal of what the class struggle should look like. Pretty soon he complains that the student volunteers "have no say" in policy, i.e., he demands that powers of decision be partly shifted out of the union members' hands and into those of the alien-class visitors who have deigned to donate their time. Or, finding that the internal life and democracy of the union are far from satisfactory, he may decide that the Farm Workers do not really deserve his support. He would bestow his saving presence only on certified-pure class struggles taking place on a different planetary plane.

Item. The trade-union movement was very behindhand in producing opposition to the Vietnam war, as is well known, while antiwar feeling grew around the campuses. In student circles, the programmatic touchstone for complete opposition to the war came to be the slogan of unilateral withdrawal, which was richly justified. But finally, here and

there pockets of antiwar opposition in the trade-union movement did start developing. Eventually a number of the more socially conscious and progressive labor leaders did screw up courage and founded the Labor Assembly for Peace in the teeth of violent denunciations by the Meany bureaucracy. These beginnings were timid in many respects, and, among other hesitancies, stated opposition to the war without specifying the slogan of unilateral withdrawal. We know of no more flagrant example of the sect mentality than the scornful attitude taken by New-Leftists toward this beginning of an organized anti-war opposition in the labor movement. Even in the San Francisco Bay Area, which had the most militant and most wide-open branch of the Labor Assembly for Peace and where leaders of the group if not the group itself openly spoke out for unilateral withdrawal, not one single New-Leftist eligible could be persuaded to taint his soul by having anything to do with a group so backward as to fall short of the unilateral-withdrawal program. The fact that this development represented the first steps of a responsible sector of the trade unions moving into collision with the established powers – this fact meant nothing to the sectists. The only consideration they understood was their soul-saving shibboleth, which they counterposed to the real initiation of class motion.

5. The Rut We Are In

Such is the road of the sect. How to get out of that rut? There are two notions that try to remedy the ills of sectism by broadening the sect. The intention is good; the remedy impractical.

One is the proposal to abolish sectarianism by a call for the unity of all the sects. This may also be presented as a road to forming a socialist "movement". It is a piteous illusion. In practice, it may mean a spate of unity negotiations among some of the sects (a common time-killing enterprise), or even a unification or two (a drop out of the bucket). But the actual unification of all the sects is an inherent impossibility where the programmatic shibboleths on which the sects are based are politically incompatible. The product of sect unification turns out to be nothing but a somewhat larger sect, as long as the conditions for a genuine socialist movement do not obtain. The idea of an "all-inclusive" sect is a will o' the wisp.

Incompatible political programs can be held together, at least for a historical period, within the framework of a party/movement; for the cement which holds such a formation together is its role in the class struggle itself, the fact that it is the class-in-movement; what holds the antagonistic political tendencies in place is the pressure of the class enemies outside. As long as this is not the real situation of the movement, nothing else can take its place, including exhortations against "sectarianism".

The second proposal is one that aims at the same result by a different route: viz., launching a sect whose distinguishing programmatic point is that it will voluntarily eschew distinguishing programmatic points. This is to be achieved by limiting the program to some minimum socialist (or radical) basis on which "everyone" can agree, i.e., a statement of abstract socialism. If a left wing wants to push the group to a revolutionary position, like "No support to Democrats," the minimum is exploded; in practice, therefore, the program must be reformist. The Socialist Party has wanted to be this kind of sect most of the time since it ceased to be a mass movement; and more

recently the New American Movement has set out to concretize this aim in some still unclear form.

Sometimes the aim is derived by reminiscence from the different historical period (before 1917) when the Socialist Party was a congeries of different political views which were not yet consciously understood to be basically antagonistic and whose consequences had not yet been acted out. But we cannot simply pass a motion to go back to the Debs era.

As long as the life of the organization (whether or not labeled "party") is actually based on its politically distinctive ideas, rather than on the real social struggles in which it is engaged, it will not be possible to suppress the clash of programs requiring different actions in support of different forces. The key question becomes the achievement of a mass base, which is not just a numerical matter but a matter of class representation. Given a mass base in the social struggle, the party does not necessarily have to suppress the internal play of political conflict, since the centrifugal force of political disagreements is counterbalanced by the centripetal pressure of the class struggle. Without a mass base, a sect that calls itself a party cannot suppress the divisive effect of fundamental differences on (for example) supporting or opposing capitalist parties at home in the shape of liberal Democrats and such, or supporting or opposing the maneuvers of the "Communist" world.

6. What Then?

If the road of the sect is a blind alley, what then?

The road of the sect has always been a blind alley; yet socialist movements have come into existence.

There has never been a single case of a sect which developed into, or gave rise to, a genuine socialist movement – by the only process that sects know, the process of accretion. The sect mentality typically sees the road ahead as one in which the sect (one's own sect) will grow and grow, because it has the Correct Political Program, until it becomes a large sect, then a still larger sect, eventually a small mass party, then larger, etc., until it becomes large and massy enough to impose itself as the party of the working class in fact. But in two hundred years of socialist history, this has never actually happened, in spite of innumerable attempts.

This is no proof that it will never happen in the unforeseeable future. But it is proof that there must be some other road to the formation of a genuine socialist movement which is not the road of the sect.

This road has been will-nigh totally forgotten in the general "sectification" of socialist circles in our period. the slightest acquaintance with Marx's view of what is to be done to build a socialist movement is enough to remind that Marx was violently and unconditionally hostile to anything resembling a sect. Not only did he never try to organize a Marxist sect, but he positively scorned those who did.

It is less easily understood that Lenin never wanted to form a sect and never did do so, and that the Bolshevik party was not the result of a sect formation that grew by accretion. When Lenin came out of exile in 1900 and went abroad to begin the struggle to permeate the existing socialist circles with the ideas of revolutionary Marxism, he never thought to et up an ideological grouplet of his own, a sect, even though the

Russian socialists in exile were already divided into sects (which were already splitting, etc.).

What Lenin helped to launch was a Marxist political center in a non-sect form, in the form of a periodical manned by an editorial board, **Iskra**.

The political center itself educated for full revolutionary Marxism. At the same time, the party/movement it called for was an all-inclusive socialist party in which the revolutionary Marxist center would constitute one tendency, hopefully eventually dominant. Both sides of the picture conditioned each other: "Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all firmly and definitely draw the lines of demarcation between the various groups [tendencies]," wrote Lenin on launching Iskra. But the lines of demarcation were not to be drawn along sect lines, with organizational walls bounding them: this was the sect course which he did not follow.

Iskra was not merely a "literary" enterprise: this is a misunderstanding. A worker in Russia became an "**Iskra**ist" insofar as he agreed with the political views of that political center; and as an "**Iskra**ist" he himself became a political center for further spreading those views in the popular circles in which he worked, in his factory, in his village, in his socialist circle. One of the views spread by this political center was that the party/movement to be built should be a broad one. Lenin never gave up this conception of how to build a socialist movement at any time before the October Revolution. It was on the basis of this conception that the Leninist party actually evolved.

We do not propose either the Russian movement or Lenin's course as the model for America in the 1970s. The significance of the case is different. On the other hand, it is many of the sects that believe they are following in Lenin's footsteps in building a hard sect on the basis of a shibboleth-program. They are wrong because in this belief they have merely internalized what they have been told of the nature of "Leninism" by the anti-Bolshevik industry of the American establishment. On the other hand, the case of Lenin's road to a revolutionary party is important because he applied it uniquely. His unique course was to be serious and uncompromising about maintaining a revolutionary Marxist political center as the instrument of permeating the whole movement with its ideas, and insisting that majorities so gained be recognized by the whole movement. It was the right wing that split.

We do maintain that the alternative to the sect road which is suggested by the successes and failures of socialist history is also suggested by generalizing from Lenin's **Iskra** model as well as from a dozen other cases of the building of real socialist movements in various contexts and circumstances.

7. The Political Center

What should be done to prepare the ground for the eventual formation of a socialist movement/party in America, that is, a mass-based socialist formation which is the political expression of the working class moving toward a collision with the established powers of capitalist society?

We first address ourselves to the individual socialist who wonders what he or she should and can do other than join the sect of his choice and waste his energies in the vicissitudes of sect life:

You have the opportunity for undertaking a two-sided socialist enterprise keyed to your own circumstances. We suggest the following double-barreled liaison for you, both sides of which are necessary for the whole thing to be meaningful.

(1) Your basic contribution to the eventual formation of a socialist movement is what you do to develop a socialist circle around you where you are now. We are thinking in the first place of your role in the work-place (factory, office, school, or whatever).

First things first: what the American working-class movement needs first of all is the crystallization of an organized militant opposition in the trade unions, because this is the existing class movement of the workers and the only one.

It would be a sad sectarian mistake to think of this as a "radical" or socialist opposition, even though it will inevitably be powered mostly by radicals and socialists of sorts, and also inevitably lead its militants to think in radical and socialist terms. What is needed is a broad progressive wing of the labor movement. In Marxist terms, this is adequately defined as a wing which advocates class-struggle unionism as against business unionism, whether it defines itself in "class struggle" language or not. From the point of view of the worker, there is a felt need to carry on a militant union fight without getting "mixed up" with socialism and reds. From the point of view of the socialist, the organization of a militant opposition to the union establishment sets up an elementary school of class-struggle socialism. One of its consequences, for example, is bound to be the politicalization of the trade-union movement: its entry into independent political action, which depends in turn on breaking up its attachment to Democratic Party politics.

This opposition movement must be a loyal opposition. That means: loyal to the interests of trade-unionism in the same degree that it fights the boss and the bureaucrat, whose power is not in the interests of trade-unionism. It is necessary to proclaim this today – to put it on the banner, so to speak – because the sect radicals have been so successful in discrediting themselves before conscientious trade-unionists, and confusing "radical trade-unionism" with a sect's commando raids to rip off a plant situation by a display of "militancy" even if the workers' interests are harmed, or the union work is wrecked, as long as a couple of members are recruited to the sect. The sectists who operate in unions and plants to subordinate the workers' interests to their sect-advertising adventures and sorties are enemies of the working class and of socialism, not merely "misguided radicals" who are to be chided in Marxistical editorials. They are not "adventuristic" allies of our camp in the class struggle; they are wreckers who cannot always be distinguished from police provocateurs. Any militant opposition movement in the trade unions which makes alliances with such elements will deserve its fate.

If you are in regular contact with a number of people – in the work-place or some other "mass" situation – whom you are trying to influence in a socialist direction, then you are doing something. What the future socialist movement needs is a network of informal socialist circles – or formal ones if you will – which have an integral relation to the real struggles people are carrying on. [4*]

The same goes for the black movement, the women workers' movement, the student movement, etc.

You may be accustomed to the belief that only members of a sect are interested in such work. That is not so. There are innumerable cases where such cells of militancy

have sprung up in work-place, office or school around people who are not even socialists, or do not know they are.

What is true is that membership in a sect has often been the stimulus to undertaking this role, through group pressure and guidance, and that the sect performs the service of providing reading and study materials, etc., for the circle activity. This does point to the positive side of sect work, which we cannot deny. What this means is that socialist efforts along these lines need the assistance of a political center of some sort, to which one can look for literature, advice and help. Moreover, there soon arises the need for separate individual and circle efforts to be linked up.

(2) But the role of a political center need not be carried by a sect.

Historically, this job has been done most often and most successfully by a paper or other publication of a socialist political center which is organized simply as an editorial board or other editorial enterprise. (**Iskra** was only one of dozens of examples of how this was done as socialist movements came into existence all over the world.) Historically, also, political centers of this sort have frequently undertaken organizing functions as their influence spread, the organizing being the product or by-product of the work of its agents and representatives. (**Iskra** agents were the organizing arms of the first Leninist center.) The point would be utterly lost if these enterprises were to be considered merely literary enterprises in the usual bourgeois sense. there is a continuous line which has carried such political centers from their function as producers of "literature" to their role as centers for the stimulation of organization in one form or another.

Such political centers are operating today in this country, alongside the proliferating sects, and often quite effectively. Naturally, it is a question of political centers with widely varying political complexions, most of them distasteful to our own views and to each other's. We mention them not to celebrate their work but to exhibit alternatives to the sect road.

The **Guardian** and Sweezy's **Monthly Review** have functioned more or less as political centers emerging from a neo-Stalinist tendency of one kind or another. (Indeed, the **Guardian** is now involved with a brace of neo-Stalinist sects in talking up the formation of a Maoist "party" out of their unification.) On the right wing social-democratic side, the clique of litterateurs around Dissent functions as the only political center for that tendency that exists outside of George Meany's offices.

These examples differ in the amount of attention they pay, or have paid at other times, to the function of relating to their readers (followers) in the field. For our present purposes we wish only to stress that a political center does not have to be a sect. More: a political center can undertake a relationship with its followers which is not bedeviled by the rigid requirements of organizational life, its life-and-death votes, faction fights, splits, internal disputes, and ingrown rituals of imitating a miniature or micro-"mass party".

From the point of view of the individual socialist who wants to "do something", we would summarize our suggestion as follows:

(1) Crystallize a circle of co-thinkers around you wherever you are, in the course of your activity in the arena of the social struggle that goes along with your situation. You are the smallest-unit political center there is.

(2) Make contact with a political center that makes sense from your own point of view, for help in literature, advice, and outside linkups, and work with it to whatever

extend you find useful. But there is no reason against having this relationship with more than one political center, if they suit your own political views. Such a political center may even be a sect; but if you do not join it, it relates to you only as one political center among others. This relationship is a hang-loose relationship: if you do not have a vote in deciding its affairs, it is likewise true that it cannot tell you what to do by exerting its sect "discipline" over your own judgment. You do not erect an organizational barrier between you as the adherent of one sect and someone else who cleaves to another sect or none. In your work, you use whatever literature you wish, whatever their source. You will use your money not for the sect's fund drives but to finance your own work. If enough take this course to break up the sect system, that would be a good thing for the future potentialities of an American socialist movement.

There is a better chance of a genuine socialist movement arising out of such a hang-loose complex of relationships than out of the fossilized world of the sects. We are not under the impression that a very large number of individuals are going to start tomorrow by following the course we have described above. We have been interested so far simply in illustrating the way in which socialist movements have arisen elsewhere – the only way, in broad outline. We have sketched the kind of development which provides an alternative to the sect mode of organization which is driving American socialism into the ground.

Very likely, whatever will actually happen in this country will happen somewhat differently – as usual. If the springing up of socialist circles is not happening on a mass scale, it is also true that there is no other direction visible in which the emergence of a mass socialist movement is just around the corner. All one can do is push in a direction in which one's efforts will not be wasted, no matter what the outcome. The only thing we are sure of is that the road of the sect is a dead end.

The Independent Socialist Committee is itself an effort to establish a political center for our current of revolutionary Marxism: the view that the workers of all countries constitute the class base of a Third Camp which must fight and destroy both the capitalist system and "Communist" bureaucratic collectivism if the revolutionary democracy of a socialist world is to be established. It begins as an editorial board for the production of books and pamphlets (not yet a periodical) embodying the case for this world outlook. In this way we are exemplifying our own advice.

October 1973

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Footnotes

1*. The answer, by the way, is: No, the Cuban revolution made Castro, not vice-versa. But that is another story.

2*. We use this awkward term instead of "sectarian," which is usually understood to mean one who carries on certain policies. A term is needed for one who bases himself on sect organization, whatever the policies of the sect.

3*. For a more positive appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the New Left, see the collection **The New Left of the Sixties**, edited by M. Friedman (Independent Socialist Press, 1972).

4*. Instead of the proliferation of sect-type groups, we should like to see a proliferation of open socialistic clubs, discussion circles, forums, and similar loose and unpretentious aggregations which are formed around work-place situations by people engaged in common work. These would be among the nuclei around which a real socialist movement could crystallize, given favorable conditions. We freely recognize that favorable conditions do not obtain now, especially since the sectists would be eager to crush such hopeful developments in their lethal embrace.

Note on the text

1. This paper was originally drafted when the quarterly journal **New Politics** was planning to run a symposium on the question of how to rebuild a socialist movement in America. The editors of **New Politics** chose not to include this piece in the symposium. Later (1973) I revised the text somewhat, and it was circulated privately.

Don Hammerquist: Lenin, Leninism, and some leftovers

This is a rough piece, slightly modified from two earlier drafts that were circulated privately to generate some discussion. This version is also unfinished and its analysis and strategic and organizational conclusions are tentative and provisional. I apologize for this and for the casual citations and references to authors and political tendencies that I am just getting around to considering carefully. I'm putting the argument out in this form, hoping that any frustrations and irritations with the general sloppiness, as well as the likely differences with political characterizations that are seen as mistaken, will provide added leverage towards needed discussions on revolutionary strategy and organization.

Some of the initial responses and reactions are being posted separately. These include a few responses from positions that are cited or criticized in the text. I have made some minor changes in this version as a result of these, but nothing, I think, that would undermine or deflect the thrust of any of the interventions. More such arguments have been solicited and will continue to be welcomed.

Lenin, Leninism, and some leftovers

"Leninist socialism as defined in the period of Stalin contained something wrong somewhere..." (Comrade Binod, Nepal; 8/8/09 Kasama)

This will be a start on some arguments that I have been threatening for a while. They will probably have no more real impact than my lapsed efforts to jack up the Jacobin spirit among the libertarian left in response to the current flounderings of capital - but a little more discussion might emerge, because what is more fun than debating circumstances long removed and only dimly contextualized and with all alternatives

open to caricature. The unfortunate aspect of this is that in the heat of the debate over the political choices of past generations, the most important issues, deciding what to do and beginning to do it in the here and now, can drift further out of focus. I recognize the problem and hope that this doesn't contribute to it.

I begin from the extended discussion of the "What In the Hell…" post of 10/20/2006. This opens with the question… "What in the Hell is the appeal of Lenin?" The current political circumstances are significantly more turbulent than those of 2006 and it's possible that the complacency that permeates much of that "What in the Hell…" discussion has dissipated. However, I wouldn't bet on it. More likely, a casual avoidance of real problems still persists, still encased within unstated and untested assumptions about the self sufficiency of current strategic perspectives. Throughout this piece I will return to this fault that pervades radical views that are otherwise quite different.

I regard myself as a Leninist – frequently to the dismay of others of the ilk – and have always attempted to work to the extent possible within or towards what I view as a Leninist organizational framework. The "What in the Hell…" question is not directed to me, but to unidentified people who the blog author feels are otherwise semi-intelligent leftists. Nevertheless, leaving open if I can make the semi-intelligent bar, I'll venture what will doubtless be seen as a pro-Lenin answer to the question. So this is my take on the appeal of Lenin – which also leads into positions on his continuing relevance and a number of related issues.

The Period of Insurrection

In the rapidly changing conditions between 1914 and 1918, Lenin's writings and his political activity are a case study in the confrontation of major political questions and their practical resolution on the side of anti-capitalist revolution.

For radical anti-capitalists, the crucial elements of the period were the degeneration of the international workers movement into parliamentary reformism and national chauvinism and the transformation of proletarian revolutionary organizations and institutions into bulwarks of conservatism and caution. Towards the end of the period, this political environment was transformed by the rapid development of revolutionary potentials in Russia, and, to a lesser degree, throughout the world.

During these crucial years Lenin advanced a number of closely related strategic principles; some that reaffirmed radical positions that had been eroded and others that were essentially new. In the first place among these was the revolutionary obligation to utilize all forms of struggle against one's own imperialism under conditions of imperialist war - including those forms that were "illegal". This principle stressed

turning the imperialist war into a (class) civil war and supporting and accelerating the national liberation aspirations and struggles of peoples oppressed by one's own capitalism. This was not just a discussion topic or a matter of abstract stance. It was the grounding for Lenin's practical political program in the turbulence of 1917. The fact that this position has become a mixture of meaningless and obscurantist slogans and debating points, notably in its current use by neo-trotskyists of the Marcy bent, does nothing to diminish its relevance in the WWI period.

In the second place, Lenin challenged the trajectory of social democracy towards an institutionalized junior management role in various national capitalisms. This role is a long established fact now, but prior to WWI it was still the focus of a strategic debate over social democratic and anarcho-syndicalist parliamentary and trade union tactics in the "advanced" capitalist countries. In 1917 Russia, Lenin and his allies presented a maximalist alternative, embodied in the prioritization of Soviet Power and the rejection of the path of the "Ten Capitalist Ministers". These issues were at the core of the debates in the Petrograd Soviet during 1917 when Lenin's distinctive positions developed from a small minority position within the Bolsheviks, themselves a distinct minority in the Soviet, into the hegemonic tendency.

In the third place, the Lenin of this period rejected conceptions of necessary protracted intermediate stages for the Russian revolution – and by implication elsewhere in the world – whether such stages were justified by an alleged backwardness of economic development or the limitations of working class consciousness - or any of a range of similar reasons. He emphasized the immediate anti-capitalist potential, including the possibility for a successful class challenge to capitalist state power - a working class insurrection - specifically, although not only in Russia. In taking this stance he also effectively de-emphasized the guiding, controlling and managing role of the organized revolutionary groups – a short-lived change in priorities that, I think, contains an implied critique of many subsequent problems in communist theory and practice.

In the fourth place, Lenin advanced this strategic perspective as part of an organizational separation from opposing social democratic and anarchist tendencies. Other revolutionaries of the period shared substantial political agreement with many of his positions and in some cases developed them earlier and expressed them more carefully and coherently. But most of them, with Rosa Luxemburg as the most obvious example, tended to function as organizationally indistinct minority tendencies in a larger social democratic and, sometimes, anarchist milieu. This limited their ability to test their positions through independent radical organizing initiatives and severely limited their options at moments of revolutionary crisis.

In my opinion, this Soviet Revolutionary period is a crucial episode in the historic

struggle for the liberation of humanity from capital and the establishment of communism. It is one of the central human experiences that provide the hope for a different future. Notwithstanding the huge problems, some of which should have been apparent at the moment and others that can be seen clearly in historical hindsight, these political initiatives associated with Lenin, and the accessible history around them, are an example of a revolutionary praxis, warts and all, that should be more than enough to explain Lenin's continuing interest to all revolutionaries – including those with differences extending beyond tactical emphasis to matters of principle.

Lenin fought for his perspective during this period, at times against a Bolshevik majority. He continued the struggle through the destruction of the Russian autocratic state, the overthrow of Russian capitalism, and the establishment of what he believed was a transitional "worker's state" as a beachhead for an imminent international proletarian revolution. His approach expedited the development of a revolutionary project within the Bolsheviks - although without guaranteeing either its permanence or any specific outcomes. By any accounting, these are monumental historical achievements and it is childish to denigrate them. They still constitute the clearest attempt to collectively implement what Alain Badiou calls the "communist hypothesis".

The legitimate critical review

The fact that this was an immense struggle under extreme conditions and with major limitations on understanding and resources doesn't adequately explain, and certainly doesn't justify, the eventual outcomes. The historical fact is that with dismaying speed, fetishized and mystified organizational forms swallowed emerging capacities to elaborate a revolutionary practice. Instead of facilitating the emancipation and liberation of the oppressed and exploited, monumental piles of shit in Russia and around the world were the result. This outcome was not the unavoidable collateral damage from the struggle against "class enemies," real and fabricated, and it was not the inevitable consequence of any "objective conditions." To a significant degree, it was the result of policies and approaches which had available alternatives, and, while the mere existence of other options does not prove they would have been more successful in either the long or the short run, could the outcomes have been much worse?

To me it seems undeniable that responsibility for the degeneration of the Russian revolution rests on Lenin. Particularly on the Lenin that is not the insurrectionist revolutionary of 1917, but the architect of the revolutionary party in 1903 and the theorist of the worker's state in 1921 and the NEP in 1922. This full legacy is complex and ambiguous, but only apologists and ignorant people deny that it has elements that undermine the democratic and autonomous popular movements and institutions that must be the substance of the struggle for communism. But this darker side of Lenin is

also relevant to our current problems and potentials – relevant to many important questions where none of us have been inoculated against screwing up, and, in fact, have become quite good at it. Accordingly this side of Lenin's legacy does not subtract from his historical significance, it provides additional reasons to take it seriously.

If we are to actually learn from history, we must hold the Bolsheviks and Lenin responsible for how Russia developed and not waste time groping for partial and selective exonerations of this policy or that person. However, the process should not obscure the fact that the Russian experience is also our collective legacy. If it is scarred by bad answers, most were addressed to real questions, and many of these questions have not dissolved in the mist of history. We should not approach this collective legacy with the shallow and comfortable polarizations that have afflicted both M.L. and revolutionary anarchist perspectives. At this late date, it should not be seen as a moral divide between good and evil or a political divide between proletarian revolutionaries and petty bourgeoisie dilettantes. A clearer understanding of this legacy will help the left avoid the sterile confrontations between dogmatic and moralistic mindsets that obstruct the necessary discussions and joint initiatives within and between circles that should be able to move ahead in an increasingly cooperatively manner.

Most contemporary Marxist-Leninists spend little time on the full range of Leninist politics from the revolutionary period. (This is equally true of the bulk of their critics and some problems that originate from this additional fact will emerge down the road of this argument.) Instead, they emphasize the conception of the leading and guiding role of the centralized vanguard party - the repository for a determinate science of social formations and, as such, the ordained leadership of the people's struggles without which these struggles must inevitably fail. The mythic Bolsheviks, "...a chain without weak links..." in the profoundly mistaken words of L. Althusser, becomes the unquestioned model.

This party-centric approach asserts that only revolutionary movements led by centralized and disciplined parties have significantly challenged capitalist power. I argued from this flawed premise with blissful ignorance for decades, so I certainly understand its hold on others. Without getting into all the problems of logic and historical understanding that the position raises, it should be enough to point out that, on the one hand, the 1917 Bolsheviks came nowhere close to this centralized and disciplined model, and, on the other hand, many subsequent insurrectionary situations have contained "communist" parties that were quite monolithically centralized and disciplined, but no more revolutionary than my television set - or the capitalist ruling class.

This questionable assertion of distinctive and unique accomplishment – "we

Communists have made the revolutions – you anarchists (or Trotskyists in an earlier day) haven't" - is typically combined with placing an exaggerated blame for failures and limitations on the equivocation and vacillation of the non-M.L.party left – on alleged errors of omission by radicals who failed to challenge for power or to fully support those that did. This cripples any examination of the exercise of working class authority and power prior to, during, and following revolutionary crises; and, more specifically, it is a sectarian barrier to a thorough criticism of the actions of organized revolutionaries in these periods. As a consequence, real mistakes of commission appear as unavoidable or as isolated "accidents", and policies and attitudes that cannot be justified are rationalized and minimized in the name of single-minded revolutionary commitment to the ultimate goal. This mode of discussion also tends to divert attention from many less discussed historical examples where the M.L. Party itself is a major obstacle to revolutionary progress and not just a source of equivocation and vacillation.

However, the rejection of this party-centric religion does not mean we should embrace an alternative dogma. The Soviet experience was generally accepted by all contemporary classes and strata, friends and enemies alike, as a revolution to overthrow the power of capital. Whether or not the objectives were seen in a common way, and whatever the criticisms of the ultimate goals and the methods selected to reach them, this was the widely shared view. Now, independent radicals frequently assert that the actual outcomes of the revolution demonstrate the covert goals of Lenin and the Bolsheviks - their real motivation for seizing power.

Larry Gambone's anarchist critique of "State and Revolution", a reasoned treatment in my view, notes this general tendency among anarchists without indicating the extent to which he accepts it:

"A major bone of contention between anarchist and Marxists is over the notion of the "workers' state." Anarchists typically see these concepts as a Marxist desire to erect a powerful centralized state and party dictatorship over the working class." (Porcupine Blog, "State & Revolution", p. 1)

This typical view is the J. Edgar Hoover "Masters of Deceit" conception of communism in its anarchist clothing. To the contrary, the substitution of vanguard party for revolutionary class, the substitution of the party leadership for a developing critical cadre, the transformation of a revolutionary praxis into a religious view of truth and validity and science, the institution of the Taylorist factory regime, indeed the elimination of direct democratic participation in virtually every arena - all happened, but not because they were part of a covert authoritarian project from the outset. The Bolsheviks (and other "successful" communist parties) certainly included fakers and frauds - and perhaps even some "capitalist roaders" to use the Maoist tautology - but

none of this defined the Soviet experience or determined whether or where it went off path – which it most assuredly did. The actual process was a complex transmogrification of mistaken means initially aimed at legitimate ends. We oversimplify and caricature this process only at the great risk of repeating some of its elements.

I don't want to spend much time on this point since hopefully many radicals are moving beyond these oppositions, but I must point out that this particular dogma is an aspect of a deadening fatalism that is apparent in a wide spectrum of left perspectives - and not only anarchist ones. How can we approach politics as if what people and movements do and did, and how they understand what they are doing when they are doing it is not really that significant? But, if they can be completely misled for generations, engaging in massive self-sacrificing struggles for transcendent goals that only strengthen what is struggled against - ending with nothing more than what would have been possible with complete passivity and capitulation to capitalist rule…what else can we conclude?

(I remember how difficult it was for the Facing Reality Crew to explain why revolutionary political work was meaningful when state capitalism appeared as the ordained result of every conceivable political struggle and alignment of forces: "Organize a successful anti-capitalist insurrection - end up with state capitalism; get crushed by a fascist street force and lose to a totalitarian capitalist reaction – end up with state capitalism; shape a mass popular upsurge into a movement for basic structural reforms – end up with state capitalism." Only a faith in some underlying teleology, not to be disrupted by meddling communists, differentiates this from various capitalist "end of history" and neoliberal "There Is No Alternative" conceptions.)

Serious discussions of the core issues and questions of Leninism and its successes and failures in Russia are needed to determine what it might mean if the particular insurrectionist "communist hypothesis" identified with Lenin is indeed "saturated" (exhausted?) as Badiou claims. I believe that it is not, at least not if it is explicitly separated from the "party/state" formation that emerged in both the Soviet Union and China, and I will make some arguments in this regard later in this piece. However, genuinely satisfactory answers to such questions are entirely dependent on the development of a working political and intellectual framework for the distressingly small cadre of radicals that are committed to liberatory working class revolution.

Not just a framework for talk: As Marx said in the Eighth Thesis on Feuerbach: "All mysteries…find their rational solution in human practice and the comprehension of this practice." We certainly have lots of "mysteries," but lack the collective political practice necessary to test and evaluate alternative strategic initiatives that might provide some rational solutions. In my opinion the necessary first step in this direction in this country, and perhaps elsewhere, is to self-consciously bring together social anarchists and those

Marxist and Leninists that could live with the lower case 'm' and 'l' – although they may not have realized it yet. I'm well aware that there are many, perhaps most, in each camp that think this is impossible, unnecessary, or a mistake. I hope that later sections of this paper give some reason to believe they are wrong and helps build some bridges towards broader agreement among revolutionaries.

But first, back to Lenin…There was a time when I scraped through the Collected Works quite diligently, looking for major Lenin positions that appeared "correct" to me – or, at least, ones that were better than Soviet Marxism's permitted texts and the "famous quotations" (also Althusser d.h.). My emphasis was "State and Revolution", the "Testament" material, some stuff from around the 1905 upsurge, and, of course the extensive writings on dual power and insurrection in 1917 that I referenced earlier. The comparisons were with "What Is To be Done," "Left Wing Communism," and the generally bad stuff from the 10th and 11th Party Congresses. This dichotomized Lenin could be extended out much further, e.g., "Materialism & Empiro-Criticism" vs. "Philosophical Notebooks."

(I think some of the Kasama neoMaoists are engaged in a parallel endeavor – attempting to credit Mao with the elements in Chinese development that they view positively, and separating him from those not so positive by assigning them to contending positions within the party, or to the ubiquitous "objective limitations." That is another important discussion that I will only touch in this paper.)

I've come to the conclusion that such efforts are essentially for historians, not activists. This history will not be reinterpreted to any good and productive end by the likes of us before the development of the struggle makes the effort redundant. So I attempt to incorporate aspects of Lenin's positions that I think are relevant and useful and discount and dismiss other points without assuming any obligation to reconcile contradictions to provide the appearance of systematic coherence.

"Vanguard Party"

Although I have been arguing that it is an essentially pointless exercise to try to determine what parts of Lenin are more authentically "Leninist", this is no excuse for not examining some recurring themes in his writing and activity, particularly ones with current ramifications. The Leninist theme that is directly relevant to this piece concerns the nature and role of the "vanguard party" and I would like to spend some time on it.

There can be no doubt that Lenin was completely committed to the conception and the development of a unified, disciplined and centralized revolutionary party--a cadre party able to act as the leadership of the working class in struggle. In addition, and much more

problematic--also far less clear in Lenin's writings and political practice than with the "Leninists" that succeeded him--is the conception of the party as a core institution that should aim to unify, discipline, and centralize the entire working class and/or the "revolutionary people" around itself.

However, every one of these terms, "unified," "disciplined," "centralized," etc., is ambiguous. Lenin interpreted and applied them all differently at different points – sometimes dramatically so, as with the famous critique of the "spontaneous movement" in "What Is To be Done" and the subsequent not so famous critique of the critique a couple of years later in "The Reorganization of the Party".

Lenin wanted a revolutionary organization that was "professional," even in 1905 when he called for a membership composition of "...one Social-Democratic intellectual to several hundred Social-Democratic workers." (X, p.36). He wanted an organization that could think critically, even when he called for "...one-tenth theory and nine-tenths practice" (X, p.38). He wanted an organization that could act decisively and exercise effective discipline even when he said "Criticism...must be quite free...not only at Party meetings, but also at public meetings." (X, p.442)

(You might note that I'm relying disproportionately on Vol. 10. Much of our Collected Lenin has not survived the move to the woods. While I do think that I could easily support the same points with other references, some may disagree.)

Consider again, as a contrast, Althusser's statement about Lenin building the Bolshevik Party as the essential subjective element of the Russian revolutionary process-- a "chain with no weak links." This is the complete passage:

"Lenin was correct to see in it ("it" being the political circumstances of Russia in 1917 d.h.) the objective conditions of a Russian revolution, and to forge its subjective conditions, the means of a decisive assault on the weak link in the imperialist chain, in a Communist Party that was a chain without weak links." (For Marx, p. 98. Althusser emphasis)

This historically laughable assertion illustrates the common core – the normative objective - of the dominant Marxist-Leninist conception of the vanguard role of the party – past and present. Althusser's theoretical argument for the centrality of the party refers directly to his understanding of the famous "What Is To Be Done" critique of spontaneity. (see "For Marx", footnote 7. p. 171.). Most of the current Marxist Leninist constellation, including some pretty bright and well read people, still holds to that rigid and a-historical view, actually more a characteristic of Kautsky and Plekhanov than Lenin. This is the case despite the fact that this critique is exactly what Lenin modified

in the 1905 documents cited above, and despite the fact that most of Luxemburg's contemporaneous criticisms of that document – which she viewed as Kautskyist - have been well vindicated by historical developments. (Her positions on a number of other questions, some directly related and some not, have also survived quite well, in my opinion.)

Many anarchists assert that the What Is To Be Done critique of mass spontaneity, at least as it has come to be interpreted, effectively denies the capacity of the working class to emancipate itself and robs the conception of communism of its central dynamic, the expansion of working class autonomy and human freedom. They argue that this underlies a number of the policy mistakes that followed the Russian October. I think they are certainly right on the first point and probably at least partially right on the second. The common M.L. conception of the revolutionary party elevates centralized party command over popular creativity and initiative and there is no doubt that this should be explicitly confronted and reversed to maximize revolutionary potentials. That was true in 1917. It is more clearly true now.

The problems with the militarized structure of command and discipline which was consolidated in the Russian Party and the Communist International within a few months of Lenin's death are pretty obvious. I don't see much point in running through another what's wrong list for Chapter Six of Stalin's "Foundations". We've heard enough of "iron discipline" and know quite well that it is hardly true that once the "line is determined, organization determines everything." However the trajectory that this issue followed from the Russian revolution to this disastrous end does raise some interesting questions – at least for me: Is there a clear path from Lenin's approach to revolutionary organization to the Third International orthodoxy? If there isn't, as I think is the case, is there a central weakness within Lenin's perspective that facilitated this development? I think there is. Finally, and I confess, rhetorically, why doesn't the general recognition of the problems of "actually existing socialism" lead to a more critical approach to communist organization among those thinking Leninists who are actually attempting to organize something?

The historical questions are complicated. At one end there is Lenin's Kautskian "What is to be Done" argument for the necessity to introduce revolutionary consciousness into the working class from the "outside." Almost twenty years later we have the terrible, at least I think they are terrible, statements in "Left Wing Communism" that ridicule any idea of a distinction or conflict, not to mention a contradiction, between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of a party in the name of the proletariat. But we also have Lenin's explicit recognition, paralleling Luxemburg's observations in Mass Strike and Gramsci's in the Ordine Nuovo period, that in the upsurges of 1905 and 1917, the masses of people were more revolutionary than the social democrats and the

majority of Bolsheviks. And on the organizational side there are the well known examples of major strategic differences within the Bolsheviks being tolerated and even debated openly beyond the party under the most extreme circumstances, e.g., the "strikebreaking" of Kamenev and Zinoviev, without these individuals, or the substantial minorities they represented in the Bolshevik party, being significantly sanctioned.

Lenin frequently referred to the backwardness of the party cadre and leadership, their inability to think dialectically, and their propensity to administrative solutions, resolving ideological and theoretical issues through bureaucratic authority – sometimes even militarily. This might be the basis for a criticism of Lenin for holding an exaggerated sense of his own relative capacities, although it would take a lot of arrogance to push this point very far. However, it is no indication that he believed that the vanguard party was any place near infallibility.

We also have the interesting late writings where Lenin is so concerned with the increasingly bureaucratic and administrative character of Soviet Power that he proposes a reorganization that would empower the non-party "Workers and Peasants Inspectorate" to oversee the functioning of the elements of the state and government, and, by inference, the party. This is also hardly compatible with an exaggerated sense of what the communist party is and what it can do. In fact, it seems more like a foreshadowing of the positive aspect of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, capsulized in the slogan, "Bombard the Party Headquarters."

So I want to deal with two partial strands of the history. In one, the distinctively Leninist elements are in opposition to the future Bolshevik degeneration. In the other, his positions are a significant contribution to the process. The first strand relates to inner-party life, specifically the issues of debate and criticism that are codified under the heading of democratic centralism. The second theme I take from the anarchist, Larry Gambone (apologies if I get any of it wrong) who stresses Lenin's conflation of the concepts of centralization and unification, in a way that facilitates a reliance on mechanical and instrumental management techniques rather than the expansion of popular participation in a more organic and (dare I say it) more dialectical approach to the revolutionary process. I'm dwelling on these issues, not only because they have substantial intrinsic historic interest, but because I believe the questions involved and the range of inadequate answers to them, still plague us.

I'd like to get at the first point through a discussion that developed in the French Communist Party long after Lenin and Stalin had left the stage. In 1977, L. Althusser published a series of articles on the 22nd Congress of the French Communist Party. (I've mentioned Althusser earlier, assuming people will have some knowledge of his biography and his theoretical output, both of which in my opinion are extremely

important.) The French Party, taking advantage of the increasingly flaccid authority from Moscow, was moving towards the EuroCommunist stance of the Spanish and Italian parties in a belated and unsuccessful attempt to come to grips with the obvious problems of Soviet Marxism and the increasing failures of its own strategic perspective.

Althusser was a spokesperson for a minority tendency in the French party. He was on record as sympathetic to Maoism, had endorsed the ambivalent 70/30 attitude the Chinese Communists took towards Stalin, and seemed to agree, at least for a substantial period, with the Chinese hostility to the post 1956 Soviet critique of Stalinism. Althusser also was opposed to the parliamentary reformism and the so-called "socialist humanism" of Eurocommunism. Here again he incorporated the Chinese positions which, significantly, were not initially expressed as direct criticisms of the Soviets, but were addressed to "Comrade Togliatti," the Italian communist and Comintern veteran who was an early advocate of what become Eurocommunism.

Althusser's articles were thinly veiled criticisms from the left of proposed changes in the Party's attitude towards democracy and state power, including its renewed emphasis on cross class unity and the "peaceful parliamentary transition to socialism." But by 1977 the situation in China had deteriorated to the point where these politics no longer fit within a pro-Chinese stance and Althusser was limited to proposals to reform the structure and practice of the French C.P. to promote fuller debate and discussion of strategic issues within the Party and give he and his supporters' arguments some space to gain strength. However, as Althusser notes, notwithstanding the 22nd Congress' heavy emphasis on openness and democracy in the society, it had neither presented nor entertained initiatives to expand them within the party. So the prospects for his initiative were dim from the outset.

Althusser's interventions immediately raised the issues of democratic centralism as it had come to be understood in Communist parties fifty years or so after the Russian Revolution. The emphasis in this concept always goes to the second term – centralism – where the 'iron discipline' originates. The democracy is normally more of a problematic afterthought that provides dangerous potentials for individualist and petty bourgeois weakening of the needed discipline and resolve – and to the extent it exists, it is always "guided" and managed – usually with a very heavy hand.

For better or worse, I have a good deal more experience with these matters than most current U.S. leftists, so it might not be out of order to indicate some typical operational features of democratic centralism. Challenges from below to basic strategic approaches or major theoretical concepts are seldom, if ever, in order. Open discussions of differences are generally limited to questions of "political line" and only permitted during designated and highly structured periods, usually pre-Congress/Convention

discussions. (Many parties had very few full Congresses.) Minority arguments on "higher" bodies cannot be presented to the membership, except during pre-convention periods. Since the members of these "higher" bodies and "leading" committees are frequently co-opted or appointed, not elected, genuine differences are hard to formulate and motivate on any level. No "horizontal" political discussion or contact is permitted within the party – everything is channeled up through the structure and – sometimes - back down to the rank and file. Finally, there is no right, and very little opportunity, to raise differences within the party to individuals and groups outside of it, however relevant and important to broader constituencies the issues might be.

Implementation of this regime created ignorant and acritical communists around the world, most of them doggedly convinced of their collective capacity to provide infallible leadership for the working class, despite individually not knowing much of anything, including what was happening in the Communist movement or within the leadership of their own party. Of course, huge turnover, mass defections and some minor rebellions also resulted. All of this reaction, and particularly the rebellions, were lumped together as "deviations" and "factionalism." Both charges carried serious weight in Party circles for a long time – not only did they invoke visceral fears of losing contact with the revolution, as perverse as that may seem now, they also brought to mind the bad things that happened to left and right deviationists and to factionalists when and where Communists gained some power.

Althusser's articles include an instructive approach to factions and tendencies within the party. He asserted with his typical lack of historical references that "Lenin was against factions."...and concluded that "Today the party expects something else, (other than factions d.h.) and it is right." His practical suggestion was that party discussions on strategy should not be limited to specific periods before Congresses and that the rank and file should be aware of the differences that existed within their leadership - as was the situation, for example, in the Italian and Spanish parties at that time.

Althusser was unwilling to go any further to open up inner party life, but, predictably, his proposals went down the tube anyway. This was a sad and feeble protest. Althusser, a world class intellectual, seems not to have realized how far the democratic centralism that he was willing to accept had strayed from actual Bolshevik practice up to the 10th Congress of the CPSU in 1921 – when the Bolsheviks instituted a "temporary" ban on factions.

I have mentioned this 10th Congress period as the context for a number of Lenin's positions that I think are among the least defensible. His support for the temporary ban on factions is one of these positions. The attack on factions at the 10th Congress was aimed primarily at the "Workers Opposition" of Kollantai and Schliapnikov, a

substantial party leadership grouping that, among other things, was critical of the state capitalist features of the NEP and opposed to increasing bureaucratization and the general substitution of party authority for working class power. As I mentioned, the ban was presented as a temporary measure required by extraordinary circumstances coming out of a protracted civil war. It is also noteworthy that Lenin argued against any sanctions on the Worker's Opposition that would have banned them from future leadership roles in the party. Not that it made much difference a few years down the road.

Significantly, I think, Lenin argued for this step, not on the predictable grounds of maintaining unity and discipline in the party, but because factional divisions shifted the locus of debate to subgroupings and obstructed a full discussion in the entire party. This is quite different, if not directly opposed to permanent limits on discussion inside the party enforced by hierarchical buffers that prevented the rank and file from knowing what their leadership was arguing about; by barriers against horizontal contacts within the party; and by a ban on open political discussions of many important issues outside of the party framework.

(Lenin's argument supports a point that my particular "faction" in the CPUSA made regularly. In normal party operation, it is the leadership, typically the smallest bodies that meet most often, the Secretariat and the resident National Board in the old CPUSA for example, that constitutes a faction – monopolizing certain types of crucial information, holding closed discussions and debates and reaching decisions that bind minority positions to present a solid front of unanimity to the larger membership.)

In short, we have no historical reason to doubt that Lenin's general position on party discipline at the 10th Congress was pretty much the same as the position that he had argued more than a decade before:

"The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organizations implies universal and full freedom to criticise so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action…" (X, p. 443, emphasis in original)

Clearly, and the text makes it quite clear that Lenin understood this as well, this formulation is open to interpretation. While I know of no contrary statement from Lenin and it does describe how he worked at some crucial junctures, there is plenty of material for others to judge whether Lenin's practice was generally in line with this position or whether it was an opportunistic response to a particular situation. I'm not looking to justify or condemn on these sorts of issues. My point is only that, in principle, this position is in clear conflict with the current understanding of democratic centralism, the understanding that is accepted and reinforced by Althusser and many others who define

themselves as Marxist Leninist. I think that it is significant that both critics and worshippers usually credit Lenin with the same position on democracy within the party as the one clearly held by Stalin and, to some extent, Trotsky, but a position that is quite different from this explicit statement on the importance of clear and sharp open discussion.

Centralization and Unity

Whatever one's attitude towards the Bolsheviks, the issues of organizational discipline and political unity are still relevant concerns for revolutionaries. Here I would make a short side trip to consider a piece on the Porcupine Blog website describing Larry Gambone's approach to these issues in an organization of anarchist revolutionaries. In my opinion Gambone provides substantially less latitude for individual and minority positions, for public expression of differences, and for continuing substantive internal debate than that entailed by the Lenin position cited above. People should check it out for themselves. I suppose it might be argued that Gambone's conception is actually more workable than Lenin's, but that is another point.

Gambone also has a critique of Lenin's "State and Revolution" on the same blog. I was struck with what he sees as the central weakness of Lenin's line of argument. Gambone asserts that Lenin conflates the concepts of centralization and unity. I'm not sure whether I fully agree with his position in general, or specifically with respect to Lenin's theoretical attitudes toward class and state. However, I found it a helpful way to characterize some problems with Lenin's (any many others as well) positions on the role of the party on the practical issues that were confronted after the seizure of power.

Gambone is certainly right that organizational centralization is a problematic surrogate for political unification. Genuine political unity in a disciplined organization is inconceivable without a critical and a legitimately contested approach to all major strategic and theoretical issues. There can be no real political unity around positions that are not understood. The most extreme centralization in a party-type organization does not mean it has political unity – any more than it does or can in a military organization. The actual content of the Stalinist conception of the party is based on an essentially military model of leadership and discipline reinforced by a leadership monopoly of a determinist, pseudo scientific "materialist" and "objective" "theory" that supposedly provides it with unique access to objective truth. Thankfully, this model almost always has its cracks and imperfections, but to the extent it is consistently applied and enforced, it is a blueprint for religious cults, not revolutionary organizations.

When this process of bureaucratized centralization expands beyond the party and

governs more and more aspects of society, it necessarily constricts the possibilities for autonomous development transforming all potential for actual unity into an imprinted uniformity. The beginnings of self government created in the Russian revolutionary process required cultivation, they could not survive the centralization through command of all elements of Soviet Society.

Of course such centralization never occurs in a political vacuum and it certainly didn't in Russia. There were real problems confronted in post revolutionary Russia that cannot be reduced to an abstract lust for power by the Bolsheviks. As the likelihood of successful working class insurgencies in Europe diminished, the strategic problems of holding together the poor peasant/working class popular base for Soviet Power grew more pressing. The specter haunting the Soviets was not the Kolchaks or Denikins, the Allied Intervention, or any other attempt of the defeated ruling class to retake state power, it was the 'Revolutionary Paris, Counter-revolutionary France' dichotomy. The first generation Bolsheviks were always preoccupied with the memory of the Paris Commune. (Remember the story of Lenin dancing in the snow when the Soviets survived a day longer than the Commune.)

The Soviet response to the weakening of the strategic class alliance was to accelerate production, guided by limited and narrow economic notions of the forces of production, to meet the sometimes conflicting demands and needs of the working class (small) minority and the peasant (large) majority. That this was also Lenin's response can be clearly seen in his remarks to the 11th CPSU Congress. (Zizek uses some phrases from this for one of his "ruthless Lenin" provocations.) This response was implemented through the party's growing monopoly of positions of governmental authority. Less and less priority was put on transforming the relations of production and reproduction through the expansion of democratic and participatory institutions, and when moves in this direction potentially conflicted with economic growth, as they almost always did, the initiatives were routinely crushed.

It was true that significant economic growth was needed to satisfy enough of the practical expectations that people had of the revolution to maintain the class alliance between workers and peasants. However, when the growth was not easily achieved, the increasingly centralized party authority opted for capitalist conceptions of industrial efficiency, Taylorism and one man management. The centralization of the party took on an increasingly technocratic character, promoting notions that its leadership and "guiding role" could and should be exercised through monopolizing positions of bureaucratic authority. This essentially ended any discussions about alternative approaches. Where such alternatives emerged, including attempts to expand popular control, they first were seen as disruptive and - rather quickly - as counter revolutionary.

All sorts of bad things emanated from this supposed efficiency through centralization – the notion of worker's organizations as 'transmission belts' for industrial policy; the formation of a professional military; one man management of the firm; the eradication of organized left opposition in the country. It is true that until he died, Lenin opposed one centralizing element, the heavy pressure to limit or eliminate the right of secession for nations historically oppressed by Russia. However that struggle was also eventually a losing one –doomed in substantial part by the priority on party "guided" and managed development that was blinded by the peculiar economist bias that the Chinese call the "theory of the productive forces."

Revolutionary Organization and Working Class Self-Organization

I think that many contemporary Leninist conceptions of revolutionary organization are fundamentally misconceived, but my alternative to them--one that I am perversely determined to also call Leninist--regards the role of the party and of its cadre of communists as equally important, although with a quite different content. Since I am concerned with discussions of substance, not the labeling of categories, it may be confusing -even self defeating - to assert the claim to Leninism. I hope my attachment to the term comes across as more than stubbornness, since I mean it to go to the continuing relevance of Lenin's approach to the "art" of insurrection which I intend to consider in a later section. I'll continue to be an uncomfortable Leninist, until a more appropriate label is developed.

I've written a good deal about the topic of revolutionary organization. This emphasized the development of disciplined and organized revolutionary cadre able to think critically and act collectively and decisively. Rather than repeating the Gramsci-based arguments that I have used, or indicating the changes in my views over some four decades, I'd like to finish this piece with some observations on more practical and immediate issues of organization and perspective as I see them presented - or avoided - by class struggle anarchism and by some contemporary Marxists. Some of this will refer back to the prior section's emphasis on Lenin's legacy, but as much as possible I will deal with these issues as they come up in more current circumstances

I want to be clear from the outset that I've never been that familiar with anarchist tendencies and arguments and have also lost touch with some emerging trends in Leninism and neoMarxism that hopefully aren't limited to the academy. So I reference current positions tentatively, to clarify my own views, not to critique arguments which I don't present fully and may not adequately understand. I am completely open to criticisms in this regard and fully expect to modify my positions and arguments in response to them.

In this context, I want to make a few explanatory comments about some anarchists that I cite. I'm interested in the section of anarchism in the tradition of Bakunin, Parsons, Malatesta, and Durruti that is variously described as social anarchism, class struggle anarchism, anarcho-communism or anarcho-syndicalism. I'm only concerned in passing with the primitivists, the "national anarchists," or any of the various schools of lifestyle or individualist anarchism, and I am aware of the distinctions between these approaches and those of the class struggle social anarchists. I also wanted to use modern sources connected to some important areas of on-going anarchist experience and theory in Spain, Italy, and Latin America.

I have referred to Larry Gambone on a couple of points already. My major reference will be to Tom Wetzel of the Worker Solidarity Alliance (I think). They both express substantial positions on questions I think are important. However, I have not read many of their writings and my understanding of their positions may be inaccurate or incomplete. While both of them are clearly distinct from other important anarchist trends, I'm not sure to what extent each of them reflect the class struggle social anarchism views that I would like to engage and I make no claims in that regard. I don't even know if they would agree with each other on the topics being considered.

I'm choosing Wetzel because of some of his writing on working class organization and culture, his specific criticisms of Bolshevik attitudes towards working class autonomy, and the base-building dual power/dual organization perspective which he shares. I initially found his stuff on the "What in the Hell…" blog and ZNet, but have read only a small fraction of what he has written. I presume a more complete collection can be found on the WSA site. Wetzel appears to share a class analysis of capitalism that hasn't persuaded me to date, but I do recognize the compelling problems that it addresses, specifically with reference to understanding post revolutionary Russia and China. I don't think any differences over class analysis are significant to this discussion. I may also be mistaken on this point.

My ignorance makes Gambone a more dicey choice. I first encountered his "Porcupine Blog" on National Anarchist websites, including Troy Southgate's neo-fascist, "Synthesis" magazine. A lot of Gambone is on Keith Preston's more "anarchist," and certainly more eclectic, National Anarchist, "Attack the System" site. (Wetzel's ZNet "Re-imagining Society" article is included there as well but at least his name is misspelled.)

(I think the National Anarchism phenomenon merits way more of our attention than it has received - that won't surprise any of the unlucky handful familiar with my positions on neofascism. However, Preston is obviously attempting to cast a wide net in his red/brown merger project, and it's quite likely that he includes writings from a number

of people that would be quick to disassociate from national anarchism's key particularist organizing tenets. Hopefully this includes Gambone.)

I will focus this section around a few topics in no necessary order and somewhat jumbled together: the issue of "representation," the class struggle social anarchist conceptions of dual organization and social insertion, Badiou's conception of the "Event," and possibly some speculation about that troubling erstwhile Kasama masthead slogan "Without State Power, all else is illusion."

I probably should know who said that and what they might have meant, but it is intriguing to explore possible interpretations in full light of ignorance.

I think that most of us (but not all, unfortunately) can agree that many strategic problems concern how to conceptualize and implement Marx's injunction - also Bakunin's - that the emancipation of the working class can only be accomplished by that class itself. We can also agree with Wetzel that these problems have to be approached in light of the variations and uneveness (to say the least) in the understandings and activities of the international working class and in the differences in objective socio-economic circumstance which currently segment it. It is helpful as well, and here I don't know whether Wetzel agrees, to approach the problems in light of the range of policies and institutions, both repressive and incorporative, that constitute the exercise of capitalist state power.

The Communist Manifesto spells out a couple of general principles for the relationship of communists to the mass struggles of working people. To paraphrase: communists should "represent" the interests of the whole in the movements of parts, and they should "represent" the interests of the future in movements of the present. Even before they objected to any group claiming to have the intellectual roadmap to the "future" or to "know" the interests of the "whole," most lifestyle anarchists would be skeptical of this entire notion. They tend to see all efforts of a smaller group to project and implement appropriate strategies and objectives for a larger group, or for any of its individual members, as authoritarian. This leaves them with some problems in the face of capitalist power which has no inhibitions about crushing isolated small scale initiatives towards self rule, but they still do present a potent source of resistance to virtually any left political strategy for a so-called advanced capitalist society.

Some non-anarchist radicals – autonomists - have a slightly different critique of representation, one that is less concerned with its potential restrictions on individual liberty and more concerned with the relationship between revolutionaries and the working class and with the issue of "substitutionism." Typically they see the changing class composition of the working class as the motor and primary determinant of

historical change, but more or less independently of the conscious intent of its participants. Implicitly, and frequently explicitly, the importance of ideology and self conscious organization in the process of the class becoming "for itself," is diminished, replaced by some assumption of an underlying historic dynamic. This position can develop from a "workerist" outlook of the Johnson/Forrest or Italian variety, or from some version of the "irreducible singularities" conception in Negri's notion of the Multitude. In Negri's case, possibly a meta-consciousness, a "swarm intelligence" will come into play. This view often argues that virtually every organized intervention by communists has and will result in a net subtraction from the working class struggle. Therefore the best course for communists is to stand aside and just "describe" - or to self consciously limit their role to helping out, possibly following some variant of Lynd's notion of "accompaniment."

Wetzel makes it fairly clear that he does not share these positions ("Anarchism, Class Struggle and Political Organization", ZNet, p. 3), although I think some of his comrades may slip in that direction in their more generic criticisms of substitutionism - not that this criticism isn't usually warranted. He, and most class struggle social anarchists, recognizes the unevenness in consciousness and development in the working class and the resulting role for an organized revolutionary grouping to motivate and consolidate organizing projects that advance and expand the general struggle. This necessarily entails a degree of "representation" of the interests and potentials of social groups that are not organized and politically unified by a revolutionary organization that hopefully is. However, it does not necessarily imply any delegation of authority from the one to the other.

I intend to raise some questions, and potentially differences, with this perspective, but I agree with the general thrust of the approach. However, before getting into those subjects, I want to consider some current attitudes towards these issues among the sections of the Marxist Leninist left that do not clearly place the emancipation of the working class (and humanity) as the historic role and responsibility of that class.

MLM Options

"Socialist Revolution does not require that conscious self-identification by sociological class be a defining feature."

"...and what led... (the revolutionary process – d.h.)...were radical political forces (the communists generally) who saw themselves as representatives of the working class (and its objective interests) – and who won the allegiance of important sections of that class (often minorities, but significant sections none the less)." (8/19/09 Kasama, Mike Ely

Relying with quite amazing historical myopia on the positions Lenin advances at the beginning of "Left Wing Communism" despite almost a century of experience, most, but not all M.L. tendencies still deny or disregard any strategic problems that might emerge from the representation of the working class by a minority segment of that class or by a vanguard party. The discussions on the (generally) Maoist Kasama site tend to be much more thoughtful, however, I think, they often wind up in a similar position.

I opened this section with some comments from a recent Kasama discussion titled "Class against class vs. Revolutionary People". These same selections are also in earlier Kasama discussions that I haven't looked over carefully. There are similar statements in some extended responses to the Antaeus post of 4/27/09 "Why did Post-Maoist China restore capitalism?" I am quite sure they represent a considered position in that tendency and are not casual polemical formulations.

In my opinion, although quite possibly not in that of the author, the logical conclusion from these comments is that the revolutionary overthrow of the state power of the capitalist class will necessarily be accomplished by a movement that in no sense can be seen as the working class organized "in and for itself". Indeed, that appears to be seen as a somewhat dysfunctional and utopian conception, a simplistic example of a class reductionist perspective. Therefore any emergence of that working class capable of achieving universal liberation in the process of its own self-emancipation, is pushed down the road and presented as an objective to be achieved with the assist of the authoritarian tools provided by the prior capture of the state, if it even remains as a programmatic objective at all.

Before getting to my differences, I'd like to indicate two areas of agreement with features of this position that may not be adequately expressed in the selections that I have cited. The position certainly has a basis in history and has the merit of raising important issues in what Gramsci called the "war of maneuver"--issues of qualitative leaps, revolutionary breaks, and adequately preparing for and responding to "events" in the Badiou sense. Certainly the complexity of popular movements of resistance and refusal are as unlikely to reduce to a simple class polarization as the entire system is to reduce to domination by the economic element "in the last instance". I intend to come back to this point from the other side in criticisms, possibly mistaken ones, of some incrementalist and evolutionary features that I see in class struggle social anarchist perspectives.

Gramsci also has a conception of a "war of position" in which the development of a "counter-hegemonic social bloc" plays a central role. I think that this notion has similarities to certain aspects of Ely's conception of the 'Revolutionary People' – particularly when the consideration is of conditions prior to the seizure of state power.

Of course, that is for Ely to say, not me.

However, to stick with Gramsci categories, the Ely position appears to completely break with the conception of the "directive (dirigenti) class" which accords a unique role in the revolutionary process to the working class as such. Gramsci's position has the further merit of more clearly emphasizing the distinctions in this 'directive' role between "leadership" and "domination" (command), an area of confusions that are very relevant to the errors of actually existing socialism – the errors that underlie Binod's "…something wrong somewhere…" that I cited at the beginning of this paper.

Basically, I think that any capacity for these particular M.L. politics to respond to the rapid, but temporary and reversible shifts in political potentials in epistemological break situations, is overshadowed by the massive problems when communists see "…themselves as representatives… of the 'objective interests…" of a class without prioritizing a social practice that can develop a genuine democratic legitimacy for such a representation and ultimately render it superfluous. The problems become even more intractable when the vanguard party sees itself as the representative, not only of an underdeveloped working class, but of an entire "revolutionary people" composed of a number of classes and strata and encompassing a bewildering array of internal contradictions; and when it then proposes to utilize the instrumentalities of state power to implement its - often quite subjective - conception of the objective interests of (other) people.

I'm not arguing that revolutions or major steps towards them can't be accomplished by vanguards with only minority segments of the working classes in active and conscious support. They can, but only with real limitations that cannot be talked away. The seizure of the state by vanguards that claim to be acting in the objective interests of social classes does not answer the question about whether they actually are implementing such interests and whether they will continue to do so when they possess the instrumentalities of state power. These issues will only be displaced to the conception of "Socialism" where they will predictably confound any assertion that some short-on-workers "worker's state" or short on popular participation "New Democratic" people's state actually is "their state" for either workers or the people.

This displacement of the problem is quite clear in the history of all those "socialist revolutions" that are captained by a self-proclaimed proxy for the working class (or for a coalition of progressive classes). The real test of whether a seizure of power has initiated a trajectory towards socialism is whether working class and popular self organization and self rule is expanding. By that test these regimes fail and so – to a substantial degree – did the movements, fronts and coalitions that led to them. They don't meet the essential requirement that there be significant concrete steps towards replacing the

administration of people with the administration of things. None of them have led to increasing democracy, to authentic and expanding popular participation or to any discernable "withering away" of the functions of the bureaucratic state – at least not over any appreciable time span.

While many modern Maoist positions appear to be oblivious to these issues, there are some substantial arguments – also evident in Kasama discussions - that elements of the Chinese revolutionary experience may provide some answers to these problems, and not just illustrations of them. The thrust of these arguments is that Mao's approach to contradictions among the people, in combination with the general radical and anti-bureaucratic thrust of the Cultural Revolution could have provided a workable alternative to the failed trajectory of the Soviet Union - if it had gained hegemony in the Chinese Communist Party and had successfully reversed some seriously mistaken policies in that party.

This argument deserves to be considered on its merits, even though the showing of some applicability to Chinese circumstances wouldn't necessarily demonstrate it has a more general validity.

The argument has two elements as I understand it: First, it presents Mao's approach to contradictions among the people as a model that would limit rule by command, mandate the expansion of open critical debate, and criticize the subordination of these priorities to "efficiency", most notably including efficiency in the expansion of material production. Second, at certain points the Maoist Cultural Revolution called for establishment of a Commune State with all elected officials subject to immediate recall. This was a direct confrontation with the emerging bureaucratic nomenclatura that culminated in a call for a mass movement to "bombard the party headquarters".

According to this scenario, these features of Maoism show a different version of democratic centralism, one that recognizes the dangers of the bureaucratization of the post-revolutionary state, as Lenin did also, but that makes a much more significant attempt to reverse the process through continuing popular class struggle. In this view it is not the party centric model itself that is the problem. The problem is the mistaken line that various parties have adopted. But the hegemony of that mistaken line is not an inevitable outcome, since a clear alternative developed in China and was almost victorious in that country. While the Cultural Revolution was ultimately unsuccessful, it could conceivably have succeeded and replaced the perspectives that had captured the Chinese party with categorical alternatives. So goes the argument.

This history isn't my field, but I was active during the crucial moments and paid some attention to what was happening. I can remember the impact of the piece on

"...Contradictions among the People." The notion that disagreement wasn't necessarily always treason to the revolution and betrayal of the party, and that it could, and should, be handled through open democratic discussion was certainly refreshing. So was the "...hundred flowers..." campaign presented in the same document. It all appeared to be a much more balanced and comprehensive response to the issues that had finally emerged (for Communists, that is, who were well behind the awareness curve as usual) with the secret denunciation of Stalin's "cult of the personality" at the 20th Congress of the CPSU. It was also a welcome break from Peking Review's implausible "Great Leap Forward" economic stories about backyard steel production and Mao's ability to grow record size melons in his window box.

Some believe that this piece on non-antagonistic contradictions embodies an actual alternative conception of revolutionary organization, one that was partially employed in China, but eventually defeated. In retrospect, I certainly don't agree. The issue is important because there are revolutionary perspectives and groups that adhere to what they understand as this rectified Chinese model--a centralized vanguard (party, movement, charismatic leader) with a correct mass line leading a "revolutionary people" to state power as the platform for constructing a "socialism" - perhaps a "21st Century socialism."

We should be way past the point where we accept best readings of these historic documents and expect that there were or will be good faith applications of them in practice. So let me try a more skeptical "worst" reading of Mao on "...Contradictions among the people." Here is a key passage:

"But this freedom is freedom with leadership and democracy is democracy under centralized guidance, it is not anarchy ..."

(Note: this and the following citation are from internet sources that lack adequate page references. This passage can be found relatively early in the first section. d.h.)

Proceeding further into the argument we reach Section VIII, containing the "...hundred flowers bloom...hundred schools contend" injunction. This still sounds good as I remember it from the time. However, relatively quickly we encounter a set of the rules for dividing the "flowers" from the "poisonous weeds." Most of these rules raise questions. Consider, for example, nos. 2 and 5 that Mao indicates are the most important: Number 2 stresses that "weeds" include ideas and criticisms that will not be "...beneficial to socialism." So who decides what is beneficial and what is not? Number 5 provides a good clue to this answer: (Flowers d.h.) "...should help to strengthen and not shake off or weaken the leadership of the Communist Party." (These rules are in the middle of Section VIII. d.h.)

This clarifies a more plausible interpretation of the content of the "democracy under centralized guidance" and a better framework for understanding the limits of nice sounding positions about reasoned discussion, patient persuasion, open contention of different ideas, and the necessity to avoid arbitrary command and coercive tactics. Unfortunately, we have a near century of collective experience that demonstrates that such "worst" interpretations are the ones most likely to shed light on what actually happened.

In this particular case, the historical backdrop is significant. Mao presented the "Contradictions among the People..." speech to a major Chinese political meeting in November of 1957 – after Khruschev's secret speech to the Soviet 20th Congress; after the Hungarian and Suez events; and well after tensions had mounted with the Soviet Union over industrial aid and economic policy, over the pending Soviet reversal of the excommunication of Yugoslavia, over the Sino/Indian border conflict, over the Sino Russian border, over the Quemoy Matsu incidents, and over the increasing centrality of the "Three Peacefuls" in Soviet ideology and Russian state policy.

When these factors are introduced - and there also are others more related to internal Chinese problems, particularly the voluntarist and highly mystified approach to economic growth of the "Great Leap Forward" - a subtext of real issues is apparent for virtually every element of Mao's discussion. However, these actual issues that should have been commonly understood and democratically discussed, certainly in the Party, and, I think, generally in the society, remained mystified and, in some cases, as with the need for socialist unity, deliberately falsified. In the actual practice, the "leadership" and "centralized guidance" role that Mao endorsed for the party in this speech provided an effective barrier that denied the masses of people - and probably the bulk of the party cadres as well - any opportunity for informed and timely participation in a debate over the real alternatives that would determine the future of "their" society.

It's a bit of a diversion, but a loosely related personal experience might highlight how the M.L. approach to democratic and participatory discussion on "serious" issues actually works. By the close of the 1950s there was ample evidence in this country, some of which was widely reported in the capitalist press, that the divisions between China and the Soviet Union were growing larger and more antagonistic. Nevertheless, this was not acknowledged in the CPUSA and was definitely not a permitted topic for membership speculation.

The official Sino/Soviet break came at the 81 Party meeting in the fall of 1960. The N.Y. Times immediately carried a detailed report despite the fact that the meeting was supposed to have been closed. The Times reporting had substantial credibility, since a

couple of years earlier it had also printed Khruschev's "Secret Report" to a closed session of the 20th Congress of the CPSU and forced that report to be made public before the Communist apparatus was prepared to deal with the repercussions.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Joe Hill's "rebel girl," was the chairwoman of the U.S. Communist Party and had headed the delegation to the 81 Party meeting. (The U.S. delegation also included the Chicago jeweler, Morris Childs - aka "Solo" - a long time FBI asset, who we now know was the source for both N.Y. Times reports.) Immediately after the Moscow meeting, Gurley Flynn toured the country to report back to the party. I was at two such meetings. The first was for a definitely atypical group of rank and file communists including my parents. The meeting included a number of knowledgeable activists who were not docile receptacles for anyone's line and who read the N.Y. Times. Gurley Flynn was asked about the reports of a split between China and the Soviet Union and categorically denied that it had happened, launching into a heavy attack on; "comrades who rely too much on the capitalist press and its lies and distortions."

At a meeting of the district leaderships of Washington and Oregon the very next day, a meeting largely populated by hacks who would never think to raise embarrassing questions or to question anything that came from party authority, Gurley Flynn began her report quite differently. I still remember the words quite well:

'Comrades, I regret having to report that the Chinese comrades have fallen into complete adventurism and petty bourgeois leftism and have split with the international communist movement and the working class."

Why the difference in reports? I asked at the time and was told that it was important to organize and plan such discussions carefully in order to "maintain morale and discipline." That is what "centralized guidance" meant to me in the U.S. communist party, and it looks remarkably like what Mao is pushing in the Chinese Party in this period. The discussion only happens in a managed framework after the party leadership decides what is a "flower" and what is a "weed" for a cadre of slow-witted gardeners prone to fits of depression.

The Cultural Revolution period in the middle of the next decade is a more complicated situation. It is still hard to separate the truth from various different propaganda spins about the Cultural Revolution, particularly given the fact that very diverse tendencies all claimed to represent Maoist politics. There were certainly aspects of the movement that were anti-intellectual and presented a crude moralistic class reductionist perspective with cultish aspects. But there were also extremely important revolutionary strands centered on the Shanghai Commune experience. These were attempts to implement the directly democratic commune state – modeled on the Paris Commune – and on Lenin's

"State and Revolution." They included a frontal attack on the domination of the society by the leading cadres of the party, an attack expressed in the slogan of "bombard the party headquarters" and made more concrete in the position that some 90% of the cadre of the Chinese Communist party should be removed from any position of authority.

It does not take much investigation to find that Mao was very ambivalent towards this element of the Cultural Revolution, specifically because of its attitude towards the merged party/state bureaucratic leadership group. Mao clearly held the position that the real problems within the party were limited to a "handful in positions of authority following a capitalist road." The "handful" of capitalist-roaders (less than 10% was the way it was frequently quantified d.h.) was a constant theme in Mao's centrist response to the left tendencies that were demanding a complete dismantling of the party/state apparatus. When the disagreement proved intractable, Mao supported the use of the army against the more radical segments of the Cultural Revolution movement and they were quickly crushed. Mao's erstwhile allies among the more centrist elements in the movement shortly capitulated to similar fates providing what proved to be only a quite manageable disruption to the party structure

(Read the full piece by Antaeus on Kasama (4/27/09) and the ensuing discussion thread to see how this struggle developed – also how its suppression and failure is explained and rationalized in terms of "objective conditions" and a de-emphasizing of the point that the Shanghai Commune raised that the working class must emancipate itself.)

After the fact, there is little doubt that the left elements in Cultural Revolution had a more accurate understanding of the situation in China than Mao, assuming, as I find it very hard to do, that Mao genuinely believed all that he was saying. It is less clear, and definitely not the position of Antaeus, but I think that it is also true, that this experience demonstrates that no basic reform of the Chinese party/state was possible without calling the party-centric model into question, which specifically would include a critique of the last three words in Mao's conception of "...democracy under centralized guidance."

Transitions

The results of these workerless "worker's states," governing "for" the working class while ruling on the backs of actual working people, have been increasingly bureaucratized, repressive and exploitative societies.

Such societies may be "socialist" (of either 20th or 21st century variant) in some superficial public relations branding sense, but that are certainly still part of human prehistory and of the realm of necessity. There is no evidence that these displacements

of the representation dilemma to the post-revolutionary society has illuminated any path that is clearly in the direction of communism. This is notwithstanding a good deal of quickly forgotten propagandistic apologetics that claim this is exactly what is happening - think Venezuela currently, another demonstration of the infinite elasticity of left naiveté, a characteristic that in this and other cases is certainly not unique to the Leninists and Maoists.

There is no shortage of stubborn, thick-headed self-deception in every segment of the left, although some promote it more aggressively. But it is hard for anyone to deny that the new types of authoritarian and exploitative social formations that have emerged out of major revolutionary struggles, rather than being transitional steps to communism, have been seed beds for both evolutionary and counter-revolutionary reversions to the most barbaric capitalist archetypes. This process, combined with the futile attempts to rationalize and justify it, compound the cumulative disastrous impacts on revolutionary morale and further muddy any popular liberatory revolutionary vision.

One short side point here: I would be much more open to hopeful possibilities in the situation in Nepal, than, for example, in Venezuela, that more popular current blindspot for the left that forgets Peronism and the Monteneros, discounts the relevance of "post-democracy" positions linked to the strengthening of the state not its withering away, and hopes that the existing state will provide the impetus and resources to build from the top a dual power against it from the bottom. Good luck. In my opinion, the struggle in Nepal isn't receiving the attention it merits. It may eventually provide a catalyst for a strategic reorientation within the M.L. left towards the problems I have been describing. I don't see Venezuela functioning that way for anybody.

I opened this piece with a remark from a recent interview with a leading Maoist in Nepal identified as Comrade Binod. Of course, there is a lot in the interview that stays with the traditional party-centric formulas, although these predictable left Maoist positions seem a bit at odds with the plaintive "...something wrong, somewhere..." comment that casts its shadow over growing questions about the model of revolution that had been accepted. Comrade Binod makes it clear that his concerns revolve around popular participation, individual freedom, and the legitimacy of the exercise of power under circumstances where the strategic task of a popular insurrection is on the order of the day.

So back to the original Kasama quote: "Without State Power, all else is illusion." One actual illusion is that the capture of a state by a self proclaimed leadership is necessarily a step towards communism - whether its "leadership" is of the working class, the class "dirigente", or of a broader and vaguer "revolutionary people" that incorporates the working class. For it to be a step towards communist society, there must be discernable

movement towards the administration of things, not people. The substitution of "re-education" for the physical elimination of "class enemies" is not such a movement. Neither is it a significant revolutionary advance to replace the capitalist state with a different external authority that continues to administer people, but as if they were things – or maybe potentially wayward children.

What is needed is genuinely democratic participation in all major social decisions, as opposed to fabricated after-the-fact near-unanimities that hide the real dominance of technocratic notions of efficiency. There must be real steps towards expanding the individual freedom and autonomy necessary to make these changes real and substantive, not merely decorative. These are radically incompatible with all personality cults and near deifications of leaders or leaderships. Only with these changes will the outcome possibly be a different kind of state, a "Commune State" that will conceivably "wither away," and only then is there real hope to establish a society where the "freedom of each is the condition for the freedom of all," a society that is comprehensively and conclusively liberated from the domination of capital.

This does not stand in opposition to any possible need to exercise state power against the former ruling class – but it does indicates some limits on the methods this can employ without deforming our ultimate objectives.

Leaving aside those radicals that see separate communist organization as inherently authoritarian, the modern attempts to reconcile the Manifesto roles for communists with the notion that the working class must emancipate itself have led to this dilemma: On the one side, as Alonzo Alcazar said recently, "we are almost afraid to say 'we'" and, on the other side, as the Kasama selection above demonstrates, the self-emancipation of the working class is put on the back burner until the "Socialist Revolution" is won by an internally disciplined party leading a disparate and only partially self conscious constituency – a constituency that lacks all capacity to provide the needed external discipline over "its" vanguard, except possibly if evolutionary reformism becomes the strategy - and that is hardly a good thing.

Radicals must determine what to do and how to do it somewhere between these equally inadequate alternatives, recognizing that we will probably not stumble into insights that resolve all dilemmas. The issues will have to be constantly reinvestigated and the proposed solutions reinvigorated in the light of changing conditions and developing potentials. This need for constant reexamination of premises based on a working feedback loop between the development and the implementation of policies is another argument for a critical, but also an organized and disciplined structure for revolutionary political work. It is also, however, an argument against a structure that substitutes its own processes - even if they are qualitatively better than what we have come to expect -

for the emancipation of the working class in and for itself.

Democracy?

"From the point of view of 'organized anarchism with a class struggle perspective,' two kinds of organization are needed: (1) forms of mass organization through which ordinary people can grow and develop their collective strength, and (2) political organizations of the anarchist or libertarian socialist minority, to have a more effective means to coordinate our activities, gain influence in working class communities and disseminate our ideas."

"Dual organizational anarchists often say that the role of the anarchist political organization is to 'win the battle of ideas', that is, to gain influence within movements and among the mass of the population by countering authoritarian or liberal or conservative ideas. Bakunin had said that the role of anarchist activists was a 'leadership of ideas'."

"But disseminating ideas isn't the only form of influence. Working with others of diverse views in mass organizations and struggles, exhibiting a genuine commitment, and being a personable and supportive person in this context also builds personal connections, and makes it more likely one's ideas will be taken seriously."

"The idea of a 'vanguard party' is that a political organization is to try to draw to it the layer of the working class that has these sorts of leadership qualities and to use this 'human capital' to achieve a hegemonic position within mass movements. Its aim is to use this position of dominant influence to eventually achieve power for its party. And along the way it also thinks in terms of achieving power within the various union or mass movement organizations. This means congealing the party's power through various methods of hierarchical control. This is formal leadership power and not just influence."

"...the aim of libertarian socialism is that the masses themselves should achieve power, through mass direct democracy, not that a leadership group should do so through a party gaining control of a state. Reflecting this, the aim of the libertarian left activists should be to encourage self-management of movements/organizations."

I'm citing selected excerpts from pages 4-5 of Wetzel's article, "Anarchism, Class Struggle and Political Organization". I found the article on Z-Net, but it is available from a number of sources. The selections indicate elements of his conception of anarchist political organization and strategy and contrast them with those of a "vanguard party." Presumably Wetzel has other writings on the subject since, for example, these say

nothing about the various questions of internal unity and organizational discipline that Gambone treats in some detail. I also should note that all competent advocates of the vanguard party position would regard Wetzel's description of it as a caricature - although I find it to be a reasonable interpretation that accurately presents the way most such groups function once they reach a certain threshold of size and influence and internalize the resulting hubris.

I have a fairly wide area of agreement with this perspective - as I understand it - but there are questions, there are gaps, and perhaps there are significant differences. Accordingly, I'd like to use the final sections of this discussion to consider some class struggle social anarchist positions on organization and strategy; including issues of democracy and participation within mass struggle; the element of capitalist class power and class policy with respect to legality, legitimacy and the potentially military dimensions of the struggle; the concept of "social insertion"; some approaches to workplace organizing; ending – at last – by returning briefly to the question of insurrection. None of this will be done adequately and I again apologize in advance.

This is the major problem that I see in these selections and in my understanding of the general approach. It posits an organization of revolutionary anarchists that relates to mass struggles in a collective and organized way; it recognizes that this organization should advance distinctively anarchist ideas; it provides a list of things that "vanguard parties" supposedly think and do which revolutionary anarchist organizations should not think and do. But there's still not enough here to answer some very basic questions facing any revolutionary strategy - what are the potentials; how do we proceed; what are the appropriate standards for evaluating our work?

I mentioned earlier the importance of recognizing that we have a collective radical history, and that it is important to have a good handle on the facts of this history before making major judgments on its implications and motivations. I want to spell this out in a little more detail since I think it has particular relevance to anarchist critiques of Leninism that, in turn, are relevant to some of these questions of current approaches to work.

Although I have no overriding compulsion to defend major Leninist political interventions, past or present, general or specific, I do think we can only learn from criticizing such experiences if two conditions are met. The nature and significance of the issues that were/are addressed should be evaluated independently of the actions taken to address them. The actions taken to address them should be evaluated separately from the justifications offered for these actions, and both actions and justifications should be evaluated separately. This should provide an adequate factual groundwork before provisional judgments become hardened – which is particularly important when these

are judgments that may assume a moralistic aspect.

The anarchist alternative to vanguardism in the selections cited above present greater democratic participation as the generic answer to most of the problems of revolutionary strategy. This same tendency is evident in the historical criticisms that don't consider the possibility that the immediate issues of democracy and participation – and their limitations or restrictions – weren't the only questions, or even necessarily the pivotal ones in various episodes of struggle. This has two consequences: it reduces the responsibility for revolutionaries to collectively formulate and advance their own positions and confront the underlying issues within various struggles in their own name - and the necessity to consider whether or not this was done properly in historical situations. It promotes the tendency to make premature and exaggerated moral judgments about matters that haven't been adequately considered on a political level.

When current struggles are the focus - consider, for example, the recent anarchist exchanges over the English Oil Workers job actions that had some undeniably popular, but anti-internationalist elements – the discussions tend to be more realistic, but still not sufficiently centered on what can and should be done in situations where something must be done.

There can be a cost for being too quick to conclude a political analysis and draw moral conclusions. The accounting may come in the increased likelihood that in some marginally different circumstances parallel mistakes of commission will be made. It may also come as collateral damage from failures to confront real issues in an organized and collective way, not as external commentators and not as undifferentiated individual participants. Such errors of omission can result in important lost opportunities and even major setbacks.

There are crucial and complex issues of democracy, participation and militance where mass democratic struggles intersect with revolutionary groups that are attempting to intervene in them. It seems to me that class struggle anarchism tends to gloss over the tensions, contradictions and conflicts that are a necessary part of this intersection, although their general possibility is implied by Wetzel's notion of "unevenness" – at least in my understanding of it.

Let me paraphrase another well known Marxist proposition: the "...ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas..." (taking "ideas" in the strongest sense of the term to include a range of cultural norms many of which are not really "thought"). These ruling ideas are supported by the tremendous institutionalized momentum of historical inertia, reinforced continuously by the exercise of both repressive and incorporative aspects of capitalist state power. "Normally" in most areas of the globe, even when they are

resisting, working people and the working class are thinking, believing, and acting within some variant of capitalist ideology and capitalist culture. And, almost by the definition of normalcy, in "normal" times, no accurate index of popular opinion will show that the masses of people are with the revolutionaries, because, in a very basic sense, they are not. (Wetzel understands this, see p. 5, op cit) This is an aspect of reality that actually does matter, notwithstanding various spontaneists who discount the impact of this subordinated working class consciousness, since they see the working class always doing exactly what is possible in the given circumstances--no more and no less.

The ruling class ideas are not simply mirrored in the subordinated classes. The "high culture" of the actual rulers does not apply clichéd homilies like "Be all that you can be" or "With hard work, you can accomplish anything" to their own privileged lives. The ruling class does not question its own potential for class solidarity because "people won't stick together," although it certainly promotes such notions among the overwhelming majorities that are oppressed and exploited.

The primary manifestation of the dominance of the ruling ideas on popular attitudes is the mass buy-in to the "There Is No Alternative" mantra; the acceptance of the inevitability and essential rightness of the major features of the status quo and the ultimate folly and futility of collective resistance to it. For the majority of people, most of the time, this attitude predominates even while they are engaged in struggles and resistance that may test the framework of capitalist legitimacy in a given capitalist society and state. While these ruling ideas are never the only ideas and cultural patterns within the oppressed and dominated working classes, they determine the important segment of working class consciousness that Gramsci characterizes as "common sense," or that consciousness that is constituted as "common sense" in periods of capitalist stability and normal routine.

Looking at the same issues in a slightly different framework, most episodes of mass and class struggle include elements of a struggle for "better terms" within capitalism, for reforms, as well as at least an implicit struggle against the capitalist system. Clearly, then, moments will occur in mass struggles when participatory majorities tacitly or explicitly acknowledge their subordination in exchange for selective concessions and a circumscribed security. Struggles that de-emphasize or that oppose concrete issues of internationalism or defer possibilities to expand the opposition to white supremacy frequently take on this character in this country.

Revolutionaries have no particular interest in any reinforcement, "democratic" or not, of this subordinated working class consciousness that is neither "in itself" nor "for itself," but is distinctly "for another." When revolutionaries cave in to such popular opinions,

which certainly can be expressed in democratic decisions, the results can be just as damaging as any authoritarian manipulation. I don't see how Wetzel deals with such situations where the revolutionary group should confront and challenge strongly held positions within the class and among the people.

For revolutionaries and revolutionary organizations including anarchist ones, certain principles constitute operating hypotheses--across all types of borders, an injury to one is an injury to all; under all circumstances, it is good and therefore "right to rebel." The validity of these principles will be determined in the long run through revolutionary political practice, and not, typically, by decisions of the moment, no matter how participatory and democratic the decision process may have been. Periodic democratic reaffirmations of our principles are certainly welcome, but with or without such validation, they will remain our operating assumptions. Unless there are basic changes in the strategy and the conception of the purposes and objectives of the struggle, revolutionaries must persist in attempts to win broader support for them whatever the polling indicates. Of course there are some extremely stupid and counter-productive ways of doing this that should be avoided.

Where I agree with the anarchist perspective is that no thinking head and acting body notions and no mystified embodiment of the prospects for revolution in some individual "genius" can substitute for actual changes in the collective understanding of what is and what is possible. This understanding can only develop and become a real social force through the experience of active resistance to the power of capital and from the construction out of this resistance of a popular cultural alternative to capitalist "civilization." The introduction of notions of general "objective" interests of some broader social group can sometimes be helpful to this process, and sometimes it can be needed even though it might not be helpful, but no such intervention substitutes for decisions that the actual participants in the struggle can recognize as their own, and none should be used as a club against such decisions.

This essential function of participatory democracy in the course of struggle is degraded by the nested structures of Third International organizational centralism; an inner ring where the Party leadership is the general staff and the cadre are the disciplined soldiers; an outer ring where the party is the general staff and the working classes are the grunts – or maybe the collateral damage.

Revolutionaries will normally encounter the issues of democracy and participation in complex situations where the issues of who should decide and who should participate are not clear cut. In most cases we will be a minority working with and within larger minorities, although frequently not that much larger, under conditions where the domination of capital is at least potentially under challenge; where some resistance to

its command has developed; and where there is a need to internalize and generalize a deeper understanding of the collective experience of struggle to most effectively continue and expand it, making the break with the “ruling ideas” as categorical and durable as is possible.

An expectation that greater democratic participation will provide the best answers to all questions can obscure the real possibility that it can also substitute lowest common denominator approaches that accept the logic of capital for much less comfortable and less popular initiatives that might prove out to be more productive. It is not at all unlikely that a formally democratic and participatory approach will result in decisions that will not move the struggle forward, at least not in the opinions of the revolutionary grouping and the organized militants. So there may be moments in a struggle when a confrontation with democratically expressed “common sense” is important.

Participatory majorities in this operational context will frequently be different from statistical “majorities” in any broader quantitative sociological view. But even internally, there is no guarantee that formal democratic procedures will promote the expansion and intensification of the struggle. In fact, there will almost always be some arenas and occasions for decision making where “democracy” would certainly end or cripple the continuing struggle. Such contradictions will be reflected in tensions between the rank and file including its effective leadership in “normal” conditions and the organizing projects of revolutionary groups. It will be reflected in tensions between emergent mass vanguards and the elements tied to the security of the existing class compromises.

Of course, this is not an argument against rank and file democracy and participation and in favor of leadership and guidance of the struggle by organized groups of revolutionaries. M.L. formations also capitulate to such lowest common denominator tendencies more often than not. As Luxemburg had forecast for socialist parties in general, they are typically an organized drag on revolutionary potentials, the setters and enforcers of bureaucratic limits at times when masses of people are breaking with them. They are seldom the excessively Jacobin insurrectionists or the “dare to struggle, dare to win” kooks - on balance, unfortunately I would say.

This doesn’t mean that revolutionaries must always urge the fight forward. Many of us have experienced strikes or comparable insurgencies which have broken out of the institutionalized scripted routines and have seen a flowering of new leadership with new experiences of militant success and different conceptions of what success actually means. This upsurge of participation in a struggle, along with the more inclusive and substantive democratic discussion among the participants can lead towards more basic confrontations with capitalist economic and political power. These waves of enthusiasm can promote tactics that are not sustainable and objectives that are not attainable. This

is not always a bad thing, but neither is it always good. It can result in significant and predictable setbacks and even lead to that "Revolutionary Suicide" that some Black Panthers perversely presented as a goal, or maybe a prediction.

As a willing participant in the sixties, I can provide numbers of examples of such situations, and they still flare up regularly at moments like the height of the anti-globalization struggle. This can result in militant majorities that do not properly calculate the gaps and unevenness between what they are willing to do at a given moment and what they and others, possibly not so directly involved, will support over time. Frequently the root cause is that the experience of ruling class repression is also "uneven" and more significantly it is very unevenly understood. Popular struggles can create militant operational majorities that do not appreciate that they have an enemy with the demonstrated willingness to kill hundreds of thousands to maintain power--at times with actions that are barely rational in terms of the stakes in particular struggles. They don't understand that they have an enemy that is also able to fine tune repression, making its impact maliciously selective and compellingly divisive.

So there will be (and have been) points where it may be necessary and important to retrench, to consolidate advances and accept necessary losses, even while additional victories still seem attainable to many participants in the movement. It will certainly be unpopular, but it may be right to question or even challenge a militant majority under such conditions. Of course, this should be done with the greatest of care because nothing is more important than the willingness to fight collectively for important objectives although they may appear to be "unrealistic" within the hegemony of capital. The very worst position for revolutionary groups is to be behind the struggle when the action starts, counseling caution and timidity--patience and the long view.

Organized revolutionary groups have made mistakes in all areas and in every conceivable direction, However, no listing of past or potential mistakes takes away the need for an organized activist project, a project that is more than a stance and a vision; one that raises the need to take risks, including the risk of being quite wrong, to help transform the political context and balance of forces.

When mass insurgencies develop they transform popular consciousness and existing institutional frameworks, but never permanently. After everything is considered, revolutionaries must also act because there is no underlying dynamic that guarantees advances will be cumulative and irreversible. I don't see this understanding anywhere in Wetzel's arguments. But without it, we will be always lost: either just waiting for the "event," pretty much guaranteeing that it will impact us more than we impact it; or bogged down in a deadening march through the institutions that ties us tighter and tighter to them and to the modes of operation that are realistic within them, not to

mention, frequently binding ourselves to people that will almost certainly fall on the wrong side in an upsurge.

Beyond the issue of whether revolutionaries must organize themselves separately as a base from which to participate in class and popular mass struggles, there is the issue of the political content of that work. I agree with Gambone that the revolutionary group should be disciplined and that it should be politically unified along critical and coherent ideological lines. The questions still remain: What does it do? How does it do it?

Ruling Class Power & Policy

The vagueness of Wetzel's answers extends to another problem. A potentially revolutionary working class movement is a mortal threat to the ruling class that controls the system of laws and deploys the bodies of armed men and women. A revolutionary grouping that attempts to implement a perspective towards this end will also be seen as a threat as it begins to have some impact. In fact, we cannot assume there will always be space for open legal political advocacy of the revolutionary supercession of capital, just because it is possible now when we are a feeble challenge - not unless we also assume that very low ceilings mark the limits of our potential.

How is it proposed to contend with the power of the capitalist state and develop the capacity to deal with and within repression and illegality? The space for "legal" struggle has been much more constricted in this country at times in the past; it is essentially absent right now in many other countries. This must be taken into account. Will these issues never materialize because the U.S. left is destined to remain a tolerated nuisance at the margin providing a fig leaf of tolerance and openness to support the hegemonic power? I don't think so. And further, in my experience, these are issues that can develop and have developed almost overnight in the past -and could again.

The questions of "legality" lead directly to the problems/potentials of military forms of struggle and these also must be treated in a clear fashion. We know that these are immediately issues in much of the world, how can they be off the table in the center of capitalist power. Is the assumption – as appears with Alcazar – that the problems are so overwhelming that we should put them out of our head and operate on the premise that legality will be the norm and not the exception, since no forms of illegal activity, specifically including armed struggle, are viable in this country? This is a risky assumption for a number of obvious reasons. One that is less obvious is the growing presence of other revolutionary tendencies, neo-fascist to national anarchist, that explicitly do not accept it and are increasingly attracted to modern theories of "a-symetric" "4th Generation Warfare."

Wetzel doesn't pursue these issues in what I've read as I don't intend to pursue them here. I have to assume that he might think it is a discussion for another time and place--and another method and format – as I do also.

However, we are left with the situation where, to an unfortunate degree, Wetzel's approach appears to rely on a cooperative capitalist state standing aside until it is too late to successfully defend itself, allowing us to develop an effective counterpower contending only with our own bumbling and with working class inertia. We are left with no indication of any responsibilities of revolutionaries to prepare for insurrection, for the forceful destruction of the state apparatus of capitalism when and where political circumstances make it possible. Not to mention the opposite responsibilities - including work to prevent premature or otherwise problematic military initiatives.

Instead, Wetzel offers a gradual and prolonged process of creating a dual power alternative through incremental steps which will "wither away" the capitalist counterpower. This does not take adequate account of the very "unevenness" of struggle that Wetzel raises. It doesn't consider how today's advances can obstruct tomorrow's struggles - how concessions in one area can facilitate repression in another. It doesn't take account of other political players with other agendas that are not going to be content to sit back and watch. In short, I think it is a perspective with serious utopian downsides, one that will have a great difficulty transcending the "unevenness" of the struggle and developing a mass revolutionary constituency that will not live in the old way any longer.

"Social Insertion"

I want to make some brief comments on the concept of "social insertion," an aspect of some class struggle social anarchist perspectives which Wetzel endorses. I understand that this conception was initially projected in Latin America to broaden the political approach for Latin American anarchist groups with a clandestine armed struggle background and focus. These groups were encountering major limitations on their ability to relate to mass working class constituencies and mass struggles under changing political conditions. So the notion must have some connection to the southern cone guerilla movements and their "continental strategy" that was influenced by the anarchist Abraham Guillen, a comrade of Durruti, and someone whose writings on armed struggle and revolutionary strategy I've always liked and found useful.

Before I understood these origins of the concept, I had interpreted it more broadly and simplistically as a corrective to tendencies among U.S. anarchists to confine political work within incestuous "scenes" and milieus, usually ones branded by generational and class privilege. But even with a more accurate understanding of the concept, I see some

problems with Wetzel's brief description of it. I'd make two points: First, Wetzel appears to assume that organizations of revolutionaries are destined to be dominated by a declassed strata, able to treat its living circumstances and class role as life style options. While that may be an accurate description of present reality in this country, hopefully it is a reality that can be surpassed and revolutionaries with working class origins and working class futures will play an increasingly central role more akin to the situation in the Chicago anarcho-syndicalists, the historic IWW, and, to a lesser extent, to some aspects of C.P. and Trotskyist experience. Certainly this change in social composition should be part of the short range objectives of any revolutionary movement, and, at least under conditions of basic legality there is no justification for not prioritizing it. In fact, in my opinion, the extent to which this objective is met and working class "organic intellectuals" develop is an important test of the strategic perspectives that are being implemented.

Perhaps more important, revolutionary groups must understand the potential impact of mass upsurges on their structures and methods and have the flexibility to respond to them. With modern possibilities for social movement and with instantaneous global communication there may be moments when newly activated forces from the social base flood the political organizations with new ideas and new people that don't need to be inserted because they already come from the workplace and the community.

Workplace Organizing

When I look at the practical application of class struggle anarchist perspectives in this country, I'm not struck by the differences with M.L. vanguardism as much as by similarities with M.L. conservatism and incrementalism. Clear differences in political stance don't appear to result in significantly different approaches to work. If I was a naive visitor from Mars, I might think that - looking towards broader unity - this might have a potential good side. We know better than that. So I'm more concerned with the bad side; with the common promotion of frameworks for struggle that fight for today's gains without seeing their potential to be tomorrow's problems, frameworks that too often incorporate the struggle within capital thereby helping it adapt to changing circumstances.

I only want to make a few brief points limited to some issues in workplace organizing: the attitude towards contract unionism and "union reform" and the attitude towards the shop steward/committeeman post. This will take me quickly into areas where my lack of detailed knowledge of actual anarchist practice might result in exaggerations and other mistakes. As I have said, my reading has been limited and narrow, particularly with respect to approaches outside of North America. I would welcome corrections on any of this.

The tactical attitude towards unions and particularly towards the workplace and the process of production is an important question for the left, one with a range of options, not all of which are exclusive. One common approach is to emphasize work in organized workplaces that mobilizes a sufficient rank and file base to eventually capture and "reform" dysfunctional or collaborationist unions and revitalizes "class struggle" unionism. Another, slightly less favored is to emphasize work in unorganized situations (going "deeper into the class" as some less objectionable M.L. groups say) intending to eventually organize and certify a union, or to decertify a "bad" union in favor of a "good" one. Then there are possibilities with "independent" and with dual unions or alternatively a "base committee" approach.

(I have some experiences with all of the above, none particularly successful, but have always favored yet another option: organize a direct action mass grouping of workers at the point of production that can begin to understand the relevance of class issues beyond their particular shop floor--whatever the nature of the union or whether or not there is one. This approach has it problems as well, but they are a matter for a different discussion.)

It appears to me that class struggle social anarchism trends in this country tend to opt for more traditional approaches within the union reform genre. I don't think this is the case with Wetzel, based on his extended exchange with Carl Davidson that is appended to the article I've been citing. However, there appears to be a bit of contract unionism, "boring from within", and NLRB fetishism in IWW circles. Again, I may be factually wrong here, but, if I am not, this is questionable in this country, where trade unions and union contracts have formal juridical status and limits that constrict trade union organizing within a framework that explicitly recognizes and actively enforces the legitimacy of capitalist property rights and management prerogatives. The focus on contract unionism is usually a diversion from the issues of power in the workplace toward a quasi-parliamentary struggle for influence within the union, a form of struggle that the overwhelming majority of workers avoid like the plague. It is a diversion from the immediate arena of management command and worker resistance where the understanding of the potential power of autonomous organization can best be developed.

For those M.L. groups whose ideal situation is to capture an elected paid union leadership position, or at least to become part of the organizing or educational staff, these factors don't present any problems. Their working objective is the accumulation of positions of influence and authority within reform movements. Wetzel is completely correct in criticizing this conceptualization of a revolutionary "leading role" that amounts to placing communists and their allies in leadership positions in reform

movements and organizations. The situation is, or at least it should be, much more complicated for revolutionaries who are attempting to build centers of autonomous activity that challenge all forms of delegated authority.

Short of becoming a paid official, which is almost always a disaster, the closest approach to the actual class struggle normally available within the union reform perspective only gives radicals sufficient access and influence to open up negotiations with the union structure and its paid lawyers and organizers, acting as proxies for management. Even the best of such union oriented work is forced to focus on the type of worker, the union militant, that is frequently a careerist and is recognized as such by peers - a "politician" who may talk a good militant and radical line when they are among the "outs" in the union, but only until they become the "ins." Such folks do not normally emerge as part of a militant organic leadership of significant struggles and, in fact, frequently turn out to be an additional layer of obstacles.

But what about the shop steward/shop committeeman? Is that a different position that can help radicals coalesce a revolutionary political base? I don't think so. Groups I worked have worked with in the past looked at the British shop stewards movement as an organizing model, but found it inadequate, at least for this country. In the first place, there were significant differences in circumstances. The British union system at the time did not have legally binding specific term contracts that outlawed job actions and the British Shop Stewards movement was not bound from the outset by those no strike strictures as any parallel formation in this country would be. In Britain the shop stewards grouping was able to organize job actions independently of the union structure, cutting across industrial divisions and union jurisdictions, even including the potential to initiate political strikes or a national general strike. There were clearly limits, but at least the British shop stewards generally represented workers to unions and management. In this country shop stewards must enforce the contract and generally represent unions and management to workers.

Despite the fact that almost every left perspective shares the goal, the question of whether revolutionaries active in workplaces should aim to become shop stewards or similar officials is no slam dunk - not if the goal is revolutionary organizing work at the workplace. Shop steward credentials are not that hard to come by for radicals in most organized workplaces unless they are completely socially dysfunctional. However, despite their cachet in radical subcultures, in the workplace the essence of the steward's role is to enforce labor discipline on other workers. That is the quid pro quo of the grievance system. Any steward that does not go along will not be an effective representative of the workers. Any steward that does go along will have problems "representing the interests of the future in the movements of the present."

The shop floor is the base point where workers can exercise their potential power over the work process. The steward function is a delegation of that power to an institution with a prior commitment not to employ it. It is infinitely better to have workers that still retain some trade unionist illusions learn themselves from the contradictions impacting this role, rather than having revolutionaries acting as good reformists in the pursuit of some skewed notion of efficiency. I don't want to extend any of these arguments too far since, as I have said, I'm no longer that close to the actual discussions of people doing this work. I do think it is a topic area that should be pursued.

Conclusion

This will be brief.

I recently read a report by an Irish class struggle social anarchist about a tour he took around the U.S. and his impressions of the anarchist movement overall and in specific localities. One point that I noted with more than a little consternation was that he treated "insurrectionist anarchism" as little more than the anti-working class anarchist primitivism of the Eugene variant. It does seem that class struggle social anarchists tend to discount the politics of insurrection, ceding the issue to various "post-left" elements, including the "crazies" among the life style anarchists, where it becomes little more than an element of generational extremism, a theatrical pose that will evaporate in the face of any real repression, if not at the mere possibility of repression such as followed after 9/11.

I think that the issue of insurrection, the basic reason to take Lenin seriously, is an essential element of a revolutionary perspective right now. I don't think that Wetzel or much of the class struggle social anarchist tendency agree. But I think it is hard to apply his concept of "unevenness" without reaching this conclusion. The ebbs and flows of the revolutionary process in different geographical and social spaces, combined with the different ruling class policies of suppression and incorporation make it unlikely that any political perspective can incrementally advance towards a revolutionary transformation without there being moments where only an exercise of collective will, a leap into the realm of the possible with no guarantees, will prevent an effective reversal of the process. As this dilemma emerges globally in open spaces and across boundaries, with different stages of development and different rates of change forming a complex mosaic where no one element can be treated in isolation, the issue of whether to take power when it appears possible, but also problematic, will inevitably emerge and we will either have a prepared - or an unprepared, and therefore certainly inadequate - response.

The development of mass revolutionary sentiment is not an extended and uniform process, but the result of sharp breaks and new normals that produce a strata of

revolutionaries today that may not even have been the reformists of yesterday. These are not people who are discovered through a process of patiently arguing and convincing, but people who create and discover themselves through the unexpected leaps in perception and self conception that happen in actions, fights, struggles.

Alain Badiou, who I must get around to reading instead of reading about, has this conception of the "event"; sharp epochal changes that can transform potentials and problems - opening up new vistas for revolutionaries, if they recognize what is happening in time, if they have a program to capitalize on it in time, if they are not trapped in old paradigms until the time is passed. There are problems that I see with my limited understanding of Badious's argument. It looks like there is little worthwhile doing until the event occurs, but we don't know its coming and we may miss it, so we must be content with mulling over the "idea of communism."

I think, alternatively, that revolutionary organization should work to precipitate the "event" because that is the course most likely to leave us prepared to capitalize on it. I think this involves developing organizational forms that are mobile and flexible, and that are looking to intervene, not because they have the truth, but as a part of the development of the will to create new truths.

I think further that we should be aware of the specific liabilities that are tied to our ultimate goals as communists. We look to promote a universalistic liberatory future. But the very "unevenness" of the political circumstances creates obstacles to our perspective that are advantages to certain of our radical rivals. Rivals who also look to take advantage of an "event", but in ways that threaten to unleash a centrifugal spiral into barbarism.