

3

On the Content of Socialism (1955–1957): Excerpts

From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Idea of the Proletariat's Autonomy (1955)*

The ideas set forth in this discussion will perhaps be understood more readily if we retrace the route that has led us to them. Indeed, we started off from positions in which a militant worker or a Marxist inevitably places himself at a certain stage in his development – positions therefore that everyone we are addressing has shared at one time or another. And if the conceptions set forth here have any value at all, their development cannot be the result of chance or personal traits but ought to embody an objective logic at work. Providing a description of this development, therefore, can only increase the reader's understanding of the end result and make it easier for him to check it against his experience.¹

Like a host of other militants in the vanguard, we began with the discovery that the traditional large 'working-class' organizations no longer have a revolutionary Marxist politics nor do they represent any longer the interests of the proletariat. The Marxist arrives at this conclusion by comparing the activity of these 'socialist' (reformist) or 'communist' (Stalinist) organizations with his own theory. He sees the so-called Socialist parties participating in bourgeois governments, actively repressing strikes or movements of colonial peoples, and championing the defence of the capitalist fatherland while neglecting even to make reference to a socialist system of rule [*régime*]. He sees the Stalinist 'Communist' parties sometimes carrying out this same opportunistic policy of collaboration with the bourgeoisie and sometimes an 'extremist' policy, a violent adventurism unrelated to a consistent revolutionary strategy. The class-conscious worker makes the same discoveries on the level of his working-class experience. He sees the socialists squandering their energies trying to moderate his class's economic demands, to make any

* 'Sur le contenu du socialisme', *S. ou B.*, 17 (July 1955). Reprinted as *CS I* in *CS*, pp. 67–102. Preceding the article was the following note: 'This article opens up a discussion on programmatic problems, which will be continued in forthcoming issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.' [T/E: The present abridged version of *CS I* reprints the introductory section (*PSW I*, pp. 290–7).]

effective action aimed at satisfying these demands impossible, and to substitute for the strike interminable discussions with the boss or the State. He sees the Stalinists at certain times strictly forbidding strikes (as was the case from 1945 to 1947) and even trying to curtail them through violence² or frustrating them underhandedly³ and at other times trying to horsewhip workers into a strike they do not want because they perceive that it is alien to their interests (as in 1951–2, with the 'anti-American' strikes). Outside the factory, he also sees the Socialists and the Communists participate in capitalist governments without it changing his lot one bit, and he sees them join forces, in 1936 as well as in 1945, when his class is ready to act and the regime has its back against the wall, in order to stop the movement and save this regime, proclaiming that one must 'know to end a strike' and that one must 'produce first and make economic demands later'.

Once they have established this radical opposition between the attitude of the traditional organizations and a revolutionary Marxist politics expressing the immediate and historical interests of the proletariat, both the Marxist and the class-conscious worker might then think that these organizations 'err' [*se trompent*] or that they 'are betraying us'. But to the extent that they reflect on the situation, and discover for themselves that reformists and Stalinists behave the same way day after day, that they have always and everywhere behaved in this way, in the past, today, here and everywhere else, they begin to see that to speak of 'betrayal' or 'mistakes' does not make any sense. It could be a question of 'mistakes' only if these parties pursued the goals of the proletarian revolution with inadequate means, but these means, applied in a coherent and systematic fashion for several dozen years, show simply that the goals of these organizations are not our goals, that they express interests other than those of the proletariat. Once this is understood, saying that they 'are betraying us' makes no sense. If, in order to sell his junk, a merchant tells me a load of crap and tries to persuade me that it is in my interest to buy it, I can say that he is trying to deceive me [*il me trompe*] but not that he is betraying me. Likewise, the Socialist or Stalinist party, in trying to persuade the proletariat that it represents its interests, is trying to deceive it but is not betraying it; they betrayed it once and for all a long time ago, and since then they are not traitors to the working class but consistent and faithful servants of other interests. What we need to do is determine whose interests they serve.

Indeed, this policy does not merely appear consistent in its means or in its results. It is embodied in the leadership stratum of these organizations or trade unions. The militant quickly learns the hard way that this stratum is irremovable, that it survives all defeats, and that it perpetuates itself through co-optation. Whether the internal organization of these groups is 'democratic' (as is the case with the reformists) or dictatorial (as is the case with the Stalinists), the mass of militants have absolutely no influence over its

orientation, which is determined without further appeal by a bureaucracy whose stability is never put into question; for even when the leadership core should happen to be replaced, it is replaced for the benefit of another, no less bureaucratic group.

At this point, the Marxist and the class-conscious worker are almost bound to collide with Trotskyism.⁴ Indeed, Trotskyism has offered a permanent, step-by-step critique of reformist and Stalinist politics for the past quarter-century, showing that the defeats of the workers' movement – Germany, 1923; China, 1925–7; England, 1926; Germany, 1933; Austria, 1934; France, 1936; Spain, 1936–8; France and Italy, 1945–7; etc. – are due to the policies of the traditional organizations, and that these policies have constantly been in breach of Marxism. At the same time, Trotskyism⁵ offers an explanation of the policies of these parties, starting from a sociological analysis of their makeup. For reformism, it takes up again the interpretation provided by Lenin: The reformism of the socialists expresses the interests of a labour aristocracy (since imperialist surplus profits allow the latter to be 'corrupted' by higher wages) and of a trade-union and political bureaucracy. As for Stalinism, its policy serves the Russian bureaucracy, this parasitic and privileged stratum that has usurped power in the first workers' State, thanks to the backward character of the country and the setback suffered by the world revolution after 1923.

We began our critical work, even back when we were within the Trotskyist movement, with this problem of Stalinist bureaucracy. Why we began with that problem in particular needs no long involved explanations. Whereas the problem of reformism seemed to be settled by history, at least on the theoretical level, as it became more and more an overt defender of the capitalist system,⁶ on the most crucial problem of all, that of Stalinism – which is *the* contemporary problem *par excellence* and which in practice weighs on us more heavily than the first – the history of our times has disproved again and again both the Trotskyist viewpoint and the forecasts that have been derived from it. For Trotsky, Stalinist policy is to be explained by the interests of the Russian bureaucracy, a product of the degeneration of the October Revolution. This bureaucracy has no 'reality of its own', historically speaking; it is only an 'accident', the product of the constantly upset balance between the two fundamental forces of modern society, capitalism and the proletariat. Even in Russia it is based upon the 'conquests of October', which had provided socialist bases for the country's economy (nationalization, planning, monopoly over foreign trade, etc.), and upon the perpetuation of capitalism in the rest of the world; for the restoration of private property in Russia would signify the overthrow of the bureaucracy and help bring about the return of the capitalists, whereas the spread of the revolution worldwide would destroy Russia's isolation – the economic and political result of which was the bureaucracy – and would give rise to a new revolutionary explosion

of the Russian proletariat, who would chase off these usurpers. Hence the necessarily empirical character of Stalinist politics, which is obliged to waver between two adversaries and makes its objective the utopian maintenance of the status quo; it even is obliged thereby to sabotage every proletarian movement any time the latter endangers the capitalist system and to over-compensate as well for the results of these acts of sabotage with extreme violence every time reactionaries, encouraged by the demoralization of the proletariat, try to set up a dictatorship and prepare a capitalist crusade against 'the remnants of the October conquests'. Thus, Stalinist parties are condemned to fluctuate between 'extremist' adventurism and opportunism.

But neither can these parties nor the Russian bureaucracy remain hanging indefinitely in midair like this. In the absence of a revolution, Trotsky said, the Stalinist parties would become more and more like the reformist parties and more and more attached to the bourgeois order, while the Russian bureaucracy would be overthrown with or without foreign intervention so as to bring about a restoration of capitalism.

Trotsky had tied this prognostication to the outcome of the Second World War. As is well known, this war disproved it in the most glaring terms. The Trotskyist leadership made itself look ridiculous by stating that it was just a matter of time. But it had become apparent to us, even before the war ended, that it was not and could not have been a question of some kind of time lag but, rather, of the *direction* of history, and that Trotsky's entire edifice was, down to its very foundations, mythological.

The Russian bureaucracy underwent the critical test of the war and showed it had as much cohesiveness as any other dominant class. If the Russian regime admitted of some contradictions, it also exhibited a degree of stability no less than that of the American or German regime. The Stalinist parties did not go over to the side of the bourgeois order. They have continued to follow Russian policy faithfully (apart, of course, from individual defections, as take place in all parties): they are partisans of national defence in countries allied to the USSR, adversaries of this kind of defence in countries that are enemies of the USSR (we include here the French CP's series of turnabouts in 1939, 1941, and 1947). Finally, the most important and extraordinary thing was that the Stalinist bureaucracy extended its power into other countries; whether it imposed its power on behalf of the Russian army, as in most of the satellite countries of Central Europe and the Balkans, or had complete domination over a confused mass movement, as in Yugoslavia (or later on in China and in Vietnam), it instaurated in these countries regimes that were in every respect similar to the Russian regime (taking into account, of course, local conditions). It was obviously ridiculous to describe these regimes as degenerated workers' States.⁷

From then on, therefore, we were obliged to look into what gave such stability and opportunities for expansion to the Stalinist bureaucracy, both

in Russia and elsewhere. To do this, we had to resume the analysis of Russia's economic and social system of rule. Once rid of the Trotskyist outlook, it was easy to see, using the basic categories of Marxism, that Russian society is divided into classes, among which the two fundamental ones are the bureaucracy and the proletariat. The bureaucracy there plays the role of the dominant, exploiting class in the full sense of the term. It is not merely that it is a privileged class and that its unproductive consumption absorbs a part of the social product comparable to (and probably greater than) that absorbed by the unproductive consumption of the bourgeoisie in private capitalist countries. It also has sovereign control over how the total social product will be used. It does this first of all by determining how the total social product will be distributed among wages and surplus value (at the same time that it tries to dictate to the workers the lowest wages possible and to extract from them the greatest amount of labour possible), next by determining how this surplus value will be distributed between its own unproductive consumption and new investments, and finally by determining how these investments will be distributed among the various sectors of production.

But the bureaucracy can control how the social product will be utilized only because it controls production. Because it *manages* production at the factory level, it can always make the workers produce more for the same wage; because it manages production on the societal level, it can decide to manufacture cannons and silk rather than housing and cotton. We discover, therefore, that the essence, the foundation, of its bureaucratic domination over Russian society comes from the fact that it has dominance within the relations of production; at the same time, we discover that this same function has always been the basis for the domination of one class over society. In other words, at every instant the effective essence of class relations in production is the antagonistic division of those who participate in the production process into two fixed and stable categories, directors and executives. Everything else is concerned with the sociological and juridical mechanisms that guarantee the stability of the managerial stratum; that is how it is with feudal ownership of the land, capitalist private property, or this strange form of private, nonpersonal property ownership that characterizes present-day capitalism; that is how it is in Russia with the 'Communist Party', the totalitarian dictatorship by the organ that expresses the bureaucracy's general interests and that ensures that the members of the ruling class are recruited through co-optation on the scale of society as a whole.⁸

It follows that planning and the nationalization of the means of production in no way resolve the problem of the class character of the economy, nor do they signify the abolition of exploitation; of course, they entail the abolition of the former dominant classes, but they do not answer the

fundamental problem of who will now direct production and how. If a new stratum of individuals takes over this function of direction, 'all the old rubbish' Marx spoke about will quickly reappear, for this stratum will use its managerial position to create privileges for itself, it will reinforce its monopoly over managerial functions, in this way tending to make its domination more complete and more difficult to put into question; it will tend to assure the transmission of these privileges to its successors, etc.

For Trotsky, the bureaucracy is not a ruling class since bureaucratic privileges cannot be transmitted by inheritance. But in dealing with this argument, we need only recall (1) that hereditary transmission is in no way an element necessary to establish the category of 'ruling class', and (2) that, moreover, it is obvious how, in Russia, membership of the bureaucracy (not, of course, some particular bureaucratic post) can be passed down; a measure such as the abolition of free secondary education (laid down in 1936) suffices to set up an inexorable sociological mechanism assuring that only the children of bureaucrats will be able to enter into the career of being a bureaucrat. That, in addition, the bureaucracy might want to try (using educational grants or aptitude tests 'based upon merit alone') to bring in talented people from the proletariat or the peasantry not only does not contradict but even confirms its character as an exploiting class: similar mechanisms have always existed in capitalist countries, and their social function is to reinvigorate the ruling stratum with new blood, to mitigate in part the irrationalities resulting from the hereditary character of managerial functions, and to emasculate the exploited classes by corrupting their most gifted members.

It is easy to see that it is not a question here of a problem particular to Russia or to the 1920s. For the same problem is posed in every modern society, even apart from the proletarian revolution; it is just another expression of the process of concentration of the forces of production. What, indeed, creates the *objective* possibility for a bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution? It is the inexorable movement of the modern economy, under the pressure of technique, toward the more and more intense concentration of capital and power, the incompatibility of the actual degree of development of the forces of production with private property and the market as the way in which business enterprises are integrated. This movement is expressed in a host of structural transformations in Western capitalist countries, though we cannot dwell upon that right now. We need only recall that they are socially incarnated in a new bureaucracy, an economic bureaucracy as well as a workplace bureaucracy. Now, by making a *tabula rasa* of private property, of the market, etc., revolution *can* – if it stops at that point – make the route to total bureaucratic concentration easier. We see, therefore, that, far from being deprived of its own reality, bureaucracy personifies the final stage of capitalist development.

Since then it has become obvious that the programme of the socialist

revolution and the proletariat's objective could no longer be merely the suppression of private property, the nationalization of the means of production and planning, but, rather, *workers' management* of the economy and of power. Returning to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, we established that on the economic level the Bolshevik Party had as its programme not *workers' management* but *workers' control*. This was because the Party, which did not think the revolution could immediately be a socialist revolution, did not even pose for itself the task of expropriating the capitalists, and therefore thought that this latter class would remain as managers in the workplace. Under such conditions, the function of workers' control would be to prevent the capitalists from organizing to sabotage production, to gain control over their profits and over the disposition of the product, and to set up a 'school' of management for the workers. But this sociological monstrosity of a country where the proletariat exercises its dictatorship through the instrument of the soviets and of the Bolshevik Party, and where the capitalists keep their property and continue to direct their enterprises, could not last; where the capitalists had not fled they were expelled by the workers, who then took over the management of these enterprises.

This first experience of workers' management lasted only a short time; we cannot go into an analysis here of this period of the Russian Revolution (which is quite obscure and about which few sources exist),⁹ or of the factors that determined the rapid changeover of power in the factories into the hands of a new managerial stratum. Among these factors are the backward state of the country, the proletariat's numerical and cultural weakness, the dilapidated condition of the productive apparatus, the long civil war with its unprecedented violence, and the international isolation of the revolution. There is one factor whose effect during this period we wish to emphasize: in its actions, the Bolshevik Party's policy was systematically opposed to workers' management and tended from the start to set up its own apparatus for directing production, responsible solely to the central power, i.e., in the last analysis, to the Party. This was done in the name of efficiency and the overriding necessities brought on by the civil war. Whether this policy was the most effective one even in the short term is open to question; in any case, in the long run it laid the foundations for bureaucracy.

If the management [*direction*] of the economy thus eluded the proletariat, Lenin thought the essential thing was for the power of the soviets to preserve for the workers at least the leadership [*direction*] of the State. On the other hand, he thought that by participating in the management of the economy through workers' control, trade unions, and so on, the working class would gradually 'learn' to manage. Nevertheless, a series of events that cannot be retraced here, but that were inevitable, quickly made the Bolshevik Party's domination over the soviets irreversible. From this point onward, the proletarian character of the whole system hinged on the proletarian character of

the Bolshevik Party. We could easily show that under such conditions the Party, a highly centralized minority with monopoly control over the exercise of power, would no longer be able to preserve even its proletarian character (in the strong sense of this term), and that it was bound to separate itself from the class from which it had arisen. But there is no need to go as far as that. In 1923 'the Party numbered 50,000 workers and 300,000 functionaries in its total of 350,000 members. It no longer was a workers' party but a party of workers-turned-functionaries.'¹⁰ Bringing together the 'elite' of the proletariat, the Party had been led to install this elite in the command posts of the economy and the State; hence this elite had to be accountable only to the Party, i.e. to itself. The working class's 'apprenticeship' in management merely signified that a certain number of workers, who were learning managerial techniques, left the rank and file and passed over to the side of the new bureaucracy. As people's social existence determines their consciousness, the Party members were going to act from then on, not according to the Bolshevik programme, but in terms of their concrete situation as privileged managers of the economy and the State. The trick has been played, the revolution has died, and if there is something to be surprised about, it is, rather, how long it took for the bureaucracy to consolidate its power.¹¹

The conclusions that follow from this brief analysis are clear: The programme of the socialist revolution can be nothing other than *workers' management*. Workers' management of power, i.e. the power of the masses' autonomous organizations (soviets or councils); workers' management of the economy, i.e. the producers' direction of production, also organized in soviet-style organs. The proletariat's objective cannot be nationalization and planning without anything more, because that would signify that the domination of society would be handed over to a new stratum of rulers and exploiters; it cannot be achieved by handing over power to a party, however revolutionary and however proletarian this party might be at the outset, because this party will inevitably tend to exercise this power on its own behalf and will be used as the nucleus for the crystallization of a new ruling stratum. Indeed, in our time the problem of the division of society into classes appears more and more in its most direct and naked form, and stripped of all juridical cover, as the problem of the division of society into directors and executants. The proletarian revolution carries out its historical programme only in so far as it tends from the very beginning to abolish this division by reabsorbing every particular managerial stratum and by *collectivizing*, or more exactly by *completely socializing*, the functions of direction. The problem of the proletariat's historical capacity to achieve a classless society is not the problem of its capacity physically to overthrow the exploiters who are in power (of this there is no doubt); it is, rather, the problem of how positively to organize a collective, socialized management of production and power. From then on

it becomes obvious that the realization of socialism on the proletariat's behalf by any party or bureaucracy whatsoever is an absurdity, a contradiction in terms, a square circle, an underwater bird; socialism is nothing but the masses' conscious and perpetual self-managerial activity. It becomes equally obvious that socialism cannot be 'objectively' inscribed, not even halfway, in any law or constitution, in the nationalization of the means of production, or in planning, nor even in a 'law' instaurating workers' management: if the working class cannot manage, no law can give it the power to do so, and if it does manage, such a 'law' would merely ratify this existing state of affairs.

Thus, beginning with a critique of the bureaucracy, we have succeeded in formulating a positive conception of the content of socialism; briefly speaking, 'socialism in all its aspects does not signify anything other than workers' management of society', and 'the working class can free itself only by achieving power for itself'. The proletariat can carry out the socialist revolution only if it acts autonomously, i.e. if it finds in itself both the will and the consciousness for the necessary transformation of society. Socialism can be neither the fated result of historical development, a violation of history by a party of supermen, nor still the application of a programme derived from a theory that is true in itself. Rather, it is the unleashing of the free creative activity of the oppressed masses. Such an unleashing of free creative activity is made possible by historical development, and the action of a party based on this theory can facilitate it to a tremendous degree.

Henceforth it is indispensable to develop on every level the consequences of this idea. [. . .]

Notes

- 1 In so far as this introduction gives a brief summary of the analysis of various problems already treated in this Review, we have taken the liberty of referring the reader to the corresponding articles published in *S. ou B.*
- 2 The April 1947 strike at Renault, the first great postwar working-class explosion in France, was able to take place only after the workers fought physically with Stalinist union officials.
- 3 See in *S. ou B.*, 13 (January 1954), pp. 34–46, the detailed description of the way in which the Stalinists were able to 'scuttle' the August 1953 strike at Renault without overtly opposing it.
- 4 Or with other, essentially similar currents (Bordigism, for example).
- 5 Among its serious representatives, which virtually amounts to just Trotsky himself. Present-day Trotskyists, knocked about by reality as no ideological current has ever been knocked about before, have reached such a degree of political and ideological decomposition that nothing precise can be said about them at all.
- 6 In the last analysis, our ultimate conception of working-class bureaucracy leads to a revision of the traditional Leninist conception of reformism. But we cannot dwell here on this question.
- 7 See the 'Lettre ouverte aux militants du P.C.I. et de la "IV^e Internationale"' in *S. ou B.*, 1 (March 1949), pp. 90–101. [T/E: This article, 'Open Letter to P.C.I. and "Fourth

International" Militants', is reprinted in *SB I*, pp. 185–204 (and now reprinted again in *SB**, pp. 145–58).]

- 8 See *RPR*.
- 9 1979 Note: See now *RBI* and the Brinton text cited therein [T/E: Maurice Brinton, *Bolsheviks & Workers' Control* (London: Solidarity, 1970; Detroit: Black & Red, 1975)].
- 10 Victor Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, trans. Max Shachtman (New York: Hillman-Curl, 1937), p. 150.
- 11 See *SB*.

On the Content of Socialism, II (1957)*

[Introduction]

The development of modern society and what has happened to the working-class movement over the last hundred years (and in particular since 1917) have compelled us to make a radical revision of the ideas on which that movement has been based.

Forty years have elapsed since the proletarian revolution seized power in Russia. From that revolution it is not socialism that ultimately emerged but a new and monstrous form of exploiting society and totalitarian oppression that differed from the worst forms of capitalism only in that the bureaucracy replaced the private owners of capital and 'the plan' took the place of the 'free market'. Ten years ago only a few people like us defended these ideas. Since then the Hungarian workers have brought them to the world's attention.

Among the raw materials for such a revision are the vast experience of the Russian Revolution and of its degeneration, the Hungarian workers' councils, their actions, and their programme. But these are far from being the only elements useful for making such a revision. A look at modern capitalism and at the type of conflict it breeds shows that throughout the world working

* Originally published as 'Sur le contenu du socialisme', *S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957). Reprinted as *CS II* in *CS*, pp. 103–221. The text was preceded by the following note:

The first part of this text was published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, no. 17, pp. 1–22. The following pages represent a new draft of the entire text and a reading of the previously published part is not presupposed.

This text opens a discussion on programmatic questions. The positions expressed here do not necessarily express the point of view of the entire *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group.

[T/E: This text was originally translated by Maurice Brinton under the title *Workers' Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society* (London: Solidarity, 1972), with 'Our Preface'. It was reprinted by Philadelphia Solidarity in 1974 (with forewords by Philadelphia Solidarity and the League for Economic Democracy) and 1984 as a Wooden Shoe Pamphlet (with a statement about the group, Philadelphia Solidarity, entitled 'About Ourselves', and a new introduction by Peter Dorman, 'Workers Councils . . . 25 Years Later'). In editing Brinton's translation, I have retained the headings he has added to the text, placing them in square brackets. *CS II* appeared in full in *PSW 2*, pp. 90–154. To save space, the present abridged version omits some of the more technical sections.]

people are faced with the same fundamental problems, often posed in surprisingly similar terms. These problems call everywhere for the same response. This answer is socialism, a social system that is the very opposite of the bureaucratic capitalism now installed in Russia, China, and elsewhere.

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

The task we are about to undertake not only leads us to challenge many widely held ideas about socialism, many of which go back to Lenin and some to Marx. It also leads us to question widely held ideas about capitalism, about the way it works and about the real nature of its crises, many of which have reached us (with or without distortion) from Marx himself. The two analyses are complementary and in fact the one necessitates the other.

The revision we propose did not of course start today. Various strands of the revolutionary movement – and a number of individual revolutionaries – have contributed to it over time. From the very first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* we endeavoured to resume this effort in a systematic fashion. There we claimed that the fundamental division in contemporary societies was the division into directors and executants. We attempted to show how the working class's own development would lead it to a socialist consciousness. We stated that socialism could only be the product of the autonomous action of the working class. We stressed that a socialist society implied the abolition of any separate stratum of directors and that it therefore implied the power of mass organs and workers' management of production.

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

In one sense our revision consists of making more explicit and precise what was the genuine, initial intention of Marxism and what has always been the deepest content of working-class struggles – whether at their dramatic and culminating moments or in the anonymity of working-class life in the

factory. In another sense our revision consists of a freeing of revolutionary thought from the accumulated dross of a century. We want to break the distorting prisms through which so many revolutionaries have become accustomed to looking at the life and action of the proletariat.

Socialism aims at giving a meaning to people's life and work; at enabling their freedom, their creativity, and the most positive aspects of their personality to flourish; at creating organic links between the individual and those around him, and between the group and society; at reconciling people with themselves and with nature. It thereby rejoins the most basic goals of the working class in its daily struggles against capitalist alienation. These are not aspirations about some hazy and distant future but, rather, the content of tendencies existing and manifesting themselves today, both in revolutionary struggles and in everyday life. To understand this is to understand that, *for the worker, the ultimate problem of history is an everyday problem*. To grasp this is also to perceive that socialism is not 'nationalization' or 'planning' or even an 'increase in the standard of living'. It is to understand that the real crisis of capitalism is not due to 'the anarchy of the market' or to 'overproduction' or to 'the falling rate of profit'. Indeed, it is to see the tasks of revolutionary theory and the function of the revolutionary organization in an entirely new way.

Pushed to their ultimate consequences, grasped in their full strength, these ideas transform our vision of society and the world. They modify our conception of theory as well as of revolutionary practice.

The first part of this text is devoted to the positive definition of socialism. The following part¹ concerns the analysis of capitalism and the crisis it is undergoing. This order, which might not appear very logical, may be justified by the fact that the Polish and Hungarian revolutions have made the question of the positive definition of the socialist organization of society an immediate practical question.

This order of presentation also stems from another consideration. The very content of our ideas leads us to maintain that, ultimately, one cannot understand anything about the profound meaning of capitalism and the crisis it is undergoing unless one begins with the most total idea of socialism. For all that we have to say can be reduced, in the last analysis, to this: Socialism is autonomy, people's conscious direction of their own lives. Capitalism – whether private or bureaucratic – is the ultimate negation of this autonomy, and its crisis stems from the fact that the system necessarily creates this drive toward autonomy, while simultaneously being compelled to suppress it.

The Root of the Crisis of Capitalism

The capitalist organization of social life (we are speaking about private capitalism in the West and bureaucratic capitalism in the East) creates a perpetually renewed crisis in every sphere of human activity. This crisis appears most intensely in the realm of production – ‘production’ meaning here the shop floor, not ‘the economy’ or ‘the market’. In its essence, however, the situation is the same in all other fields, whether one is dealing with the family, education, international relations, politics, or culture. Everywhere, the capitalist structure of society consists of organizing people’s lives *from the outside*, in the absence of those directly concerned and against their aspirations and interests. This is but another way of saying that capitalism divides society into a narrow stratum of directors (whose function is to decide and organize everything) and the vast majority of the population, who are reduced to carrying out (executing) the decisions made by these directors. As a result of this very fact, most people experience their own lives as something alien to them.

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

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

them. The creative faculties they are not allowed to exercise *on behalf* of a social order that rejects them (and which they reject) are now utilized *against* that social order. A permanent struggle develops at the very heart of social life. It soon becomes the source of further waste. The narrow stratum of directors has henceforth to divide its time between organizing the work of those ‘below’ and seeking to counteract, neutralize, deflect, or manipulate their resistance. The function of the managerial apparatus ceases to be merely organizational and soon assumes all sorts of *coercive* aspects. Those in authority in a large modern factory in fact spend less of their time organizing production than coping, directly or indirectly, with the resistance of the exploited – whether it be a question of supervision, of quality control, of determining piece rates, of ‘human relations’, of discussions with shop stewards or union representatives. On top of all this there is of course the permanent preoccupation of those in power with making sure that everything is measurable, quantifiable, verifiable and supervisable so as to deal in advance with any inventive counterreaction the workers might launch against new methods of exploitation. The same applies, with all due corrections, to the total overall organization of social life and to all the essential activities of any modern State.

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

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

From this angle, too, capitalism can survive only to the extent that reality does not yield to its methods and conform to its spirit. The system

functions only to the extent that the 'official' organization of production and of society is constantly resisted, thwarted, corrected, and completed by the effective self-organization of people. Work processes can be effective under capitalism only to the extent that the real attitudes of workers toward their work differ from what is prescribed. Working people succeed in learning the general principles pertaining to their work – to which, according to the spirit of the system, they should have no access and concerning which the system seeks to keep them in the dark. They then apply these principles to the specific conditions in which they find themselves, whereas in theory this practical application can be spelled out only by the managerial apparatus.

Exploiting societies persist because those whom they exploit help them to survive. Slave-owning and feudal societies perpetuated themselves because ancient slaves and medieval serfs worked according to the norms set by the masters and lords of those societies. The proletariat enables capitalism to continue by acting *against* the system. Here we find the origin of the historical crisis of capitalism. And it is in this respect that capitalism is a society pregnant with revolutionary prospects. Slavery or serf society functioned in so far as the exploited did not struggle against the system. But capitalism can function only in so far as those whom it exploits actively oppose everything the system seeks to impose upon them. The final outcome of this struggle is socialism, namely, the elimination of all externally imposed norms, methods, and patterns of organization and the total liberation of the creative and self-organizing capacities of the masses.

The Principles of a Socialist Society

[...]

[Institutions that people can understand and control]

The guiding principle of our effort to elaborate the content of socialism is as follows: Workers' management will be possible only if people's attitudes to social organization alter radically. This in turn will take place only if the institutions embodying this organization become a *meaningful* part of their real daily lives. Just as work will have a meaning only when people *understand* and *dominate* it, so will the institutions of socialist society have to become *understandable* and *controllable*. (Bakunin once described the problem of socialism as being one of 'integrating individuals into structures that they can understand and control'.)

Modern society is a dark and hidden jungle, a confusion of apparatuses, structures, and institutions whose workings no one, or almost no one, under-

stands and no one really dominates or takes any interest in. Socialist society will be possible only if it brings about a radical change in this state of affairs and massively simplifies social organization. Socialism implies that the *organization* of a society will have become transparent to its members.

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

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

'In full knowledge of the relevant facts': in these few words lies the whole problem of democracy.² It is meaningless to ask people to voice their opinions if they are not aware of the relevant facts. This has long been stressed by the reactionary or fascist critics of bourgeois 'democracy', and even by the most cynical Stalinist.³ It is obvious that bourgeois democracy is a farce, if only because literally *nobody* in capitalist society can express an opinion in knowledge of the relevant facts, least of all the mass of the people from whom political and economic realities and the real meaning of the questions asked are systematically hidden. But the answer is not to vest power in the hands of a few incompetent and uncontrollable bureaucrats. The answer is to transform social reality in such a way that essential data

and fundamental problems are understood by everyone, enabling everyone to express opinions in full knowledge of the relevant facts.

[Direct democracy and centralization]

To decide means to decide for oneself. To decide who is to decide, already is not quite deciding for oneself. The only total form of democracy is therefore *direct democracy*. And the factory council exercises authority and replaces the factory's general assembly only when the latter is not in session.⁴

To achieve the widest, the most meaningful direct democracy will require that all the economic, political, and other structures of society be based on local groups that are concrete collectivities, organic social units. Direct democracy certainly requires the physical presence of citizens in a given place when decisions have to be made. But this is not enough. It also requires that these citizens form an organic community, that they live if possible in the same milieu, that they be familiar through their daily experience with the subject to be discussed and with the problems to be tackled. It is only in such units that the political participation of individuals can become total, that people can know and feel that their involvement will have an effect, and that the real life of the community is, in large part, determined by its own members and not by unknown or external authorities who decide for them. There must therefore be the maximum amount of autonomy and self-administration for the local units.

Modern social life has already created these collectivities and continues to create them. They are based on medium-sized or large enterprises and are to be found in industry, transportation, commerce, banking, insurance, public administration, where people by the hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands spend the main part of their life harnessed to a common task, where they encounter society in its most concrete form. A place of work is not only a unit of production: it has become the primary unit of social life for the vast majority of people.⁵ Instead of basing itself on geographical units, which economic developments have rendered completely artificial, the political structure of socialism will be based largely on collectivities involved in common work. Such collectivities will be the fertile soil on which direct democracy can flourish, as the ancient city or the nineteenth-century democratic communities of free farmers in the United States were in their times, and for similar reasons.

Direct democracy gives an idea of the amount of *decentralization* that socialist society will be able to achieve. But this democratic society will have to find a means of democratically *integrating* these basic units into the social fabric as a whole as well as of achieving the necessary degree of *centralization*, without which the life of a modern nation would collapse.

It is not centralization as such that has brought about political alienation in modern societies or that has led to the expropriation of the power of the many for the benefit of the few. It comes, rather, from the constitution of separate, uncontrollable bodies, exclusively and specifically concerned with the function of centralization. As long as centralization is conceived of as the independent function of an independent apparatus, bureaucracy and bureaucratic rule will indeed be inseparable from centralization. But in a socialist society there will be no conflict between centralization and the autonomy of grass-roots organs, in so far as both functions will be exercised by the same institutions. There will be no separate apparatus whose function it will be to reunite what it has itself fragmented; this absurd task (need we recall it) is precisely the 'function' of a modern bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic centralization is a feature of all modern exploiting societies. The intimate links between centralization and totalitarian bureaucratic rule in such class societies provoke a healthy and understandable aversion to centralization among many people. But this response is often confused, and at times it reinforces the very things it seeks to correct. 'Centralization, there's the root of all evil' proclaim many honest militants as they break with Stalinism or Leninism in France as well as in Poland or Hungary. But this formulation, at best ambiguous, becomes positively harmful when it leads – as it often does – either to formal demands for the 'fragmentation of power' or to demands for a limitless extension of the power of grass-roots or factory organs, neglecting what is happening at the centre.

When Polish militants, for instance, imagine they have found the way to abolish bureaucracy when they advocate a social life organized and directed by 'several centres' (the State administration, a parliamentary assembly, the trade unions, workers' councils, and political parties), they are arguing beside the point. They fail to see that this 'polycentrism' is equivalent to the absence of any real and identifiable centre, controlled from below. And as modern society has to make certain central decisions, the 'constitution' they propose will exist only on paper. It will serve only to hide the re-emergence of a real, but this time masked (and therefore uncontrollable), 'centre' from amid the ranks of the State and political bureaucracy.

The reason is obvious: if one fragments any institution accomplishing a significant or vital function, one only creates ten times over an enhanced need for some other institution to reassemble the fragments. Similarly, if, in principle or in fact, one advocates extending the power of local councils merely to the level of the individual enterprise, one is thereby handing them over to domination by a central bureaucracy that alone would 'know' or 'understand' how to make the economy function as a whole (and modern economies, whether one likes it or not, *do* function as a whole). To refuse to face up to the question of central power is tantamount to leaving the solution of these problems to some bureaucracy or other.

Socialist society therefore will have to provide a socialist solution to the problem of centralization. This answer can only be the assumption of power by a federation of workers' councils and the institution of a central assembly of councils and of a council government. We will see further on that such an assembly and such a government do not signify a *delegation* of popular power but are, on the contrary, an *expression* of that power. At this stage we want to discuss only the principles that will govern the relationship of such bodies to the local councils and other grass-roots groups. These principles are important, for they will affect the functioning of all institutions in a socialist society.

[*The flow of information and decisions*]

In a society where the people have been robbed of political power, and where this power is in the hands of a centralizing authority, the essential relationship between this authority and its subordinate organs (and, ultimately, the people) can be summed up as follows: Channels of communication from the base to the summit transmit only *information*, whereas channels from the summit to the base transmit *decisions* (plus, perhaps, that minimum of information deemed necessary for the understanding and execution of the decisions made at the summit). The whole setup expresses not only a monopoly of power by the summit – a monopoly of decision-making authority – but also a monopoly of the *conditions* necessary for the exercise of power. The summit alone has the 'sum total' of information needed to evaluate and decide. In modern society it can only be by accident that any individual or body gains access to information other than that relating to his immediate milieu. The system seeks to avoid, or at any rate it does not encourage, such 'accidents'.

When we say that in a socialist society the central bodies will not constitute a delegation of power but will be the expression of the power of the people, we are implying a radical change in this way of doing things. Two-way communications will be instaurated between the 'base' and the 'summit'. One of the essential tasks of central bodies, including the council government, will be to collect, transmit, and disseminate information conveyed to them by local groups. In all essential fields decisions will be made at the grass-roots and will be sent back up to the 'summit', whose responsibility it will be to ensure their execution or to carry them out itself. A two-way flow of information and decisions thus will be instaurated and this will not only apply to relations between the government and the councils but will be a model for relations between all institutions and those who participate in them.

We must stress once again that we are not trying to draw up perfect blueprints. It is obvious, for instance, that to collect and disseminate information

is not a socially neutral function. Not all information can be disseminated – that would be the surest way of smothering what is relevant and rendering it incomprehensible and therefore uncontrollable. The role of the government is therefore *political*, even in this respect. This is why we call it 'government' and not the 'central press service'. But more important is its explicit function of informing people, which shall be its responsibility. The explicit function of government today is to *hide* from the people what's going on.

Socialism is the Transformation of Work

Socialism can be instaurated only by the autonomous action of the working class; it is nothing other than this autonomous action. Socialist society is nothing other than the self-organization of this autonomy. Socialism both presupposes this autonomy and helps to develop it.

But if this autonomy is people's conscious domination over what they do and what they produce, clearly it cannot merely be a *political* autonomy. Political autonomy is but a derivative aspect of the inherent content and the basic problem of socialism: the instauration of people's domination over their primary activity, the work process. We deliberately say 'instauration' and not 'restoration', for never in history has this kind of domination existed. All comparisons with historical antecedents (for instance, with the situation of the artisan or of the free peasant), however fruitful they may be in some respects, have only a limited scope and risk leading one into a backward-looking type of utopian thinking.

A purely political autonomy would be meaningless. One cannot imagine a society where people would be slaves in production every day of the week and then enjoy Sundays of political freedom. (Yet this is what Lenin's definition of socialism as 'soviets plus electrification' boiled down to.) The idea that socialist production or a socialist economy could be run, at any political level, by 'technicians' supervised by councils, or by soviets or by any other body 'incarnating the political power of the working class' is pure nonsense. *Real* power in any such society would rapidly fall into the hands of those who managed production. The councils or soviets sooner or later would wither away amid the general indifference of the population. People would stop devoting time, interest, or activity to institutions that no longer really determined the pattern of their lives.

Autonomy is therefore meaningless unless it implies *workers' management*, that is, unless it involves organized workers determining the production process themselves at the level of the shop, the plant, entire industries, and the economy as a whole. But workers' management is not just a new administrative technique. It cannot remain external to the structure of work itself.

It does not mean keeping work as it is and just replacing the bureaucratic apparatus that currently manages production with a workers' council – however democratic or revocable such a council might be. It means that for the mass of workers new relations will have to be instaurated with their work and about their work. The very *content* of work will immediately have to be altered.

Today the purpose, means, methods, and rhythms of work are determined from the outside by a bureaucratic managerial apparatus. This apparatus can manage only through resort to abstract, universal rules determined 'once and for all'. Inevitably, though, they are revised periodically with each new 'crisis' in the organization of the production process. These rules cover such matters as production norms, technical specifications, rates of pay, bonuses, and the organization of production areas. Once the bureaucratic managerial apparatus has been eliminated, this way of regulating production will be unable to continue, in either its form or its substance.

In accordance with the deepest aspirations of the working class, production 'norms' (in their present meaning) will be abolished, and complete equality in wages will be instituted. Taken together, these measures mean the abolition of economic coercion and constraint in production – except in the most general form of 'those who do not work do not eat' – as a form of discipline externally imposed by a specific coercive apparatus. *Labour discipline* will be the discipline imposed by each group of workers upon its own members, by each shop on the groups that make it up, by each factory assembly upon its shops and departments. The integration of particular individual activities into a whole will be accomplished basically by the cooperation of various groups of workers or shops. It will be the object of the workers' permanent and ongoing coordinating activity. The essential *universality* of modern production will be freed from the concrete experience of particular jobs and will be formulated by meetings of workers.

Workers' management is therefore not the 'supervision' of a bureaucratic managerial apparatus by representatives of the workers. Nor is it the replacement of this apparatus by another, similar one made up of individuals of working-class origin. It is the *abolition* of any separate managerial apparatus and the restitution of the functions of such an apparatus to the community of workers. The factory council is not a new managerial apparatus. It is but one of the places in which coordination takes place, a 'local meeting area [*permanence*]' from which contacts between the factory and the outside world are regulated.

If this is achieved it will imply that the nature and content of work are already beginning to be transformed. Today work consists essentially in obeying instructions initiated elsewhere, the direction of this activity having been removed from the executant's control. Workers' management will mean the reunification of the *functions* of direction and execution.

But even this is insufficient – or, rather, it does and will immediately lead beyond mere reunification. By restituting to the workers the functions of direction, they necessarily will be led to tackle what is today at the core of alienation, namely, the *technological structure* of work, its objects, its tools and methods, which ensure that work dominates the workers instead of being dominated by them. This problem will not be solved by the workers overnight, but its solution will be the task of that historical period we call socialism. Socialism is first and foremost the solution to *this problem*.

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

The socialist revolution will allow this process to begin. Its realization will mark the entry of humanity into the communist era. All other things – politics, consumption, etc. – are consequences, conditions, implications, and presuppositions that certainly must be looked at in their organic unity, but which can only acquire such a unity or meaning through their relation to this central problem: the transformation of work itself. Human freedom will remain an illusion and a mystification if it doesn't mean freedom in people's fundamental activity: their productive activity. And this freedom will not be a gift bestowed by nature. It will not arise automatically, by increments or out of other developments. People will have to create it consciously. In the last analysis, this is the content of socialism.

Important practical consequences pertaining to the *immediate* tasks of a socialist revolution follow from these considerations. Changing the nature of work will be tackled from both ends. On the one hand, the development of people's human capacities and faculties will have to become the revolution's highest priority. This will imply the systematic dismantling, stone by stone, of the entire edifice of the division of labour. On the other hand, people will have to give a whole new orientation to technical developments and to how such developments should be applied in the production process. These are but two aspects of the same thing: man's relationship to technique.

Let us start by looking at the second, more tangible point: technical development as such. As a first approximation, one could say that capitalist technology (the current application of technique to production) is rotten to the core, not only because it does not help people dominate their work, but

also because its aim is exactly the opposite. Socialists often say that what is basically wrong with capitalist technology is that it seeks to develop production for purposes of profit, or that it develops production for production's sake, independently of human needs (people being conceived of, in these arguments, only as potential consumers of products). The same socialists then tell us that the purpose of socialism is to adapt production to the real consumer needs of society, in relation both to the volume and to the nature of the goods produced.

Of course, all this is true. But the fundamental problem lies elsewhere. Capitalism does not utilize a socially neutral technology for capitalist ends. Capitalism has created capitalist technology, which is by no means neutral. The real intention of capitalist technology is not to develop production for production's sake: it is to subordinate and dominate the producers. Capitalist technology is characterized essentially by its drive to eliminate the human element in productive labour and, in the long run, to eliminate man altogether from the production process. That here, as everywhere else, capitalism fails to fulfil its deepest tendency – and that it would fall to pieces if it achieved its purpose – does not affect the argument. On the contrary, it only highlights another aspect of the crisis of this contradictory system.

Capitalism cannot count on the voluntary cooperation of the producers. On the contrary, it constantly runs up against their hostility (or at best indifference) to the production process. This is why it is *essential* for the machine to impose *its* rhythm on the work process. Where this is not possible capitalism seeks at least to measure the work performed. In every productive process, work *must* therefore be definable, quantifiable, supervisable from the outside – otherwise this process has no meaning for capitalism. As long as capitalism cannot dispense with the producers altogether, it *has to* make them as interchangeable as possible and reduce their work to its simplest expression, that of unskilled labour. There is no conspiracy or conscious plot behind all this. There is only a process of 'natural selection', affecting technical inventions as they are applied to industry. Some are preferred to others and are, on the whole, more widely utilized. These are the ones that fit in with capitalism's basic need to deal with labour power as a measurable, supervisable, and interchangeable commodity.

There is no capitalist chemistry or capitalist physics as such. There is not even a specifically capitalist 'technique', in the general sense of the word. There certainly is, however, a capitalist *technology*, if by this one means that, of the 'spectrum' of techniques available at a given point in time (as determined by the development of science), a given group (or 'band') of processes actually will be selected. From the moment the development of science permits a choice of several possible procedures, a society will regularly choose those methods that have a meaning for it, that are 'rational' within the framework of its own class rationality. But the 'rationality' of an

exploiting society is not the rationality of socialism. The conscious transformation of technology will therefore be a central task of a society of free workers. Correspondingly, the analysis of alienation and crisis in capitalist society ought to begin with this central core of all social relationships, which are found in the concrete relationships of production, people's relationships in work, as seen in its three indissociable aspects: the relationship of the workers with the means and objects of production, the relationships of the workers among themselves, and the relationship of the workers with the managerial apparatus of the production process. [. . .]

Workers' Management: The Factory

[Functions]

It is well known that workers can organize their own work at the level of a workshop or of part of a factory. Bourgeois industrial sociologists not only recognize this fact but point out that 'primary groups' of workers often get on with their job better if management leaves them alone and doesn't constantly try to 'direct' them.⁶

How can the work of these various 'primary groups' – or of various shops and sections – be coordinated? Bourgeois theoreticians stress that the present managerial apparatus, whose formal job it is to ensure such coordination, is not really up to the task: It has no real grip on the workers and is itself torn by internal conflicts. But, having 'demolished' the present setup by their criticisms, these modern industrial sociologists have nothing to put in its place. And, as beyond the 'primary' organization of production there has to be a 'secondary' organization, they finally fall back on the existing bureaucratic apparatus, exhorting it 'to understand', 'to improve itself', 'to trust people more', etc.⁷ The same can be said, at another level, of 'democratically reformed' or 'de-Stalinized' Russian leaders.⁸

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

The inconsistencies and shortcomings of the present managerial apparatus are such that even today individual workers or 'primary groups' are obliged to take on quite a number of coordinating tasks.⁹ Moreover, historical experience shows that the working class is quite capable of managing whole enterprises. In Spain, in 1936 and 1937, workers ran the factories. In Budapest, in 1956, according to the accounts of Hungarian refugees, big bakeries employing hundreds of workers carried on during and immediately after the insurrection. They worked better than ever before, under workers' self-management. Many such examples could be cited.

The most useful way of discussing this problem is not to weigh up, in the abstract, the 'self-managerial capacities' of the working class. It is to examine the specific functions of the present managerial apparatus and to see which of them retain meaning in a socialist enterprise and how they can be carried out there.

Present managerial functions are of four main types and we will discuss them in turn.

1 [*Coercive functions*] These functions, and the jobs that go with them (supervisors, foremen, part of the 'personnel' department), will be done away with, purely and simply. Each group of workers is quite capable of disciplining itself. It is also capable of granting authority to people drawn from its own ranks should it feel this necessary to carry out a particular job.

2 [*Administrative functions*] These relate to jobs that, in themselves, are in no way managerial in character but, rather, involve the execution of tasks necessary to the functioning of the company without being directly connected with the manufacturing process. Most of these jobs are now carried out in 'offices [*bureaux*]'. Among them are accountancy and the 'commercial' and 'general' services of the company. The development of modern production has divided up, compartmentalized, and socialized this work, just as it has done to production itself. Nine-tenths of people working in offices attached to factories carry out compartmentalized tasks of execution. Throughout their life they will do little else. Important changes will have to be brought about here.

The capitalist structure of the factory generally results in considerable overstaffing of these areas,¹⁰ and a socialist reorganization probably will result in a substantial saving of labour in these fields. Some of these departments will not only diminish in size but will witness a radical transformation of their functions. In the last few years 'commercial services' have everywhere grown enormously. In a planned socialist economy they will be concerned mainly with the bookkeeping aspects of obtaining supplies and making deliveries. They will be in contact with similar departments in supply factories and with stores that sell to consumers. Once the necessary trans-

formations have been brought about, offices will be considered 'workshops' like all others, organizing their own work and keeping in contact with other shops for purposes of coordination. They will enjoy no particular rights by virtue of the nature of their work. They have, in fact, no such rights today, and it is as a result of other factors (the division between manual and 'intellectual' labour, the more pronounced hierarchy found in offices) that individuals heading these departments can sometimes rise to the summit of the genuine 'management' of the company.

3 [*Technical functions*] These are at present carried out by people ranging from consultant engineers to draftsmen. Here too, modern industry has created a 'collective' apparatus in which work is divided up and socialized, and nine-tenths of which is made up of executants working in compartmentalized jobs. But while pointing this out in relation to what goes on *within* these particular departments, we must recognize too that these departments carry out managerial functions in relation to the rest of the factory – areas directly related to production. Once production targets have been set, it is this collective technical apparatus that selects – or is charged with selecting – the appropriate ways and means, looks into the necessary changes in tooling, determines the sequence and the details of various operations, etc. In theory the production areas merely carry out the instructions issued from the technical departments. Supposedly, a complete separation exists between those who draw up the plans and those who are charged with carrying them out under the concrete conditions of mass production.

Up to a point, all this is based on something real. Today, both specialization and technical and scientific competence are the privilege of a minority. But it does not follow at all that the best way to use this expertise is to leave it to the 'experts' to decide everything about the production process. Competence is, by definition, restricted in its scope. Outside his particular sector, or outside the particular processes he is familiar with, the technician is no better equipped to make a responsible decision than anyone else. Even within his own field, his viewpoint is inevitably limited. He will often know little about other sectors and may tend to minimize their importance although these sectors have a definite bearing on his own. Moreover – and this is more important – the technician is separated from the real process of production.

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

Will such cooperation work smoothly? There is no intrinsic reason why insurmountable obstacles should arise. The workers will have no interest in

challenging an answer that the technician, in his capacity as a technician, may give to purely technical problems. And if there are disagreements, these will rapidly be resolved in practice. The field of production allows for almost immediate verification of what this or that person proposes. That for this or that part or tool a certain type of metallic compound would be preferable (given a certain state of knowledge and certain conditions of production) cannot and will not be a matter of controversy.

But the answers provided by technique establish only a general framework. They suggest only some of the elements that will, in practice, influence the concrete production process. Within this given framework there will be a multitude of ways to organize this process. The choice will have to take into account, on the one hand, certain general considerations of 'economy' (economy of labour, of energy, of raw materials, of plant) and, on the other – and this is much more important – considerations relating to the fate of man in production. And on these questions, by definition, the only people who can decide are those directly involved. In this area the specific competence of the technician, as a technician, is nil.

In other words, what we are challenging deep down is the whole concept of a technique capable of organizing people from the outside. Such an idea is as absurd as the idea of a psychoanalytic session in which the patient would not appear, thus making psychoanalysis into just a 'technique' in the hands of the analyst. Such techniques are all just techniques of oppression and coercion offering 'personal incentives', which, ultimately, always remain ineffective.

Accordingly, the actual organization of the production process can be vested only in those who perform it. The producers will obviously take into account various technical points suggested by competent technicians. In fact, there will obviously be a permanent process of give and take, if only because the producers themselves will see new ways of organizing the manufacturing process, thereby posing new technical problems concerning which the technicians will in turn have to put forward their comments and evaluations before a joint decision can be made 'in full knowledge of the relevant facts'. But the decision, in this case as in others, will be in the hands of the producers (including the technicians) of a given shop (if it only affects a shop) – or of the factory as a whole (if it affects the whole factory).

The roots of possible conflict between workers and technicians therefore are not at all of a technical nature. If such a conflict emerged it would be a *social* and *political* conflict, arising from a possible tendency of the technicians to assume a dominating role, thereby constituting anew a bureaucratic managerial apparatus.

What would be the strength and probable evolution of such a tendency? We cannot discuss this problem in any depth. We can only re-emphasize that technicians do not constitute a majority – or even an essential part – of

the upper strata of modern economic or political management. Incidentally, to become aware of this obvious fact helps one see through the mystificatory character of all those arguments that seek to prove that ordinary people cannot manage production because they lack the 'necessary technical capacity'. The vast majority of technicians occupy only subordinate positions. They carry out only compartmentalized work, on instructions from above. Those technicians who have 'reached the top' are not there as *technicians*, but as 'managers' or 'organizers'.

Modern capitalism is *bureaucratic* capitalism. It is not – and never will be – a *technocratic* capitalism. The concept of a technocracy is an empty generalization of superficial sociologists, or a daydream of technicians confronted with their own impotence and with the absurdity of the present system. Technicians do not constitute a separate class. From the formal point of view they are just a category of salaried worker. The evolution of modern capitalism, by increasing their numbers and by transforming them into people who carry out compartmentalized and interchangeable labour, tends to drive them closer to the working class. Counteracting these tendencies, it is true, is their position in the wage and status hierarchies – and also the scanty chances for 'moving up' still open to them. But these channels are gradually being closed as the number of technicians increases and as bureaucratization spreads within its own ranks. In parallel with all this, a kind of revolt is developing among these compartmentalized and bureaucratized [*fonctionnarise*] technicians as they confront the irrationalities of the system of bureaucratic capitalism and increasingly experience difficulties in giving free rein to their capacities for creative or meaningful work.

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

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

4 [*Truly managerial functions*] The people 'consulted' by a company chairman or managing director before he makes an important decision usually number less than a dozen, even in the largest of firms. This very narrow stratum of management has two main tasks. On the one hand, it has

to make decisions concerning investment, stocks, output, etc., in relation to market fluctuations and long-term prospects: On the other hand, it has to 'coordinate' the various differences between various segments of the bureaucratic apparatus.

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

[Institutions]

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

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

2 *The general assembly* of all those who work in the plant, whether manual workers, office workers, or technicians. This will be the highest decision-making body for all problems concerning the factory as a whole. Differences or conflicts between various sectors of the factory will be thrashed out at this level.

This general assembly will embody the restoration of direct democracy to what should, in modern society, be its basic unit: the place of work. The assembly will have to ratify all but routine decisions of the factory council. It will be empowered to question, challenge, amend, reject, or endorse any decision made by the council. The general assembly itself will decide on all sorts of questions to be submitted to the council. The assembly will meet regularly, say, one or two days each month. There will, in addition, exist procedures for calling such general assemblies, if this is desired by a given number of workers, shops, or delegates.

[The Content of Workers' Management at Factory Level]

What will be the *effective content* of workers' management at the factory level, the permanent tasks it will have to accomplish? It will help us to discuss this problem if we differentiate schematically between the static and the dynamic aspects of workers' management.

[Immediate content]

Looked at in a static way, the overall plan might allocate to a given enterprise a target to be achieved within a given period of time (we will examine further on how such targets are to be determined). The general means to be allocated to the enterprise (to achieve its target) also will be broadly outlined by the plan. For example, the plan will decide that the annual production of a given automobile factory should be so many cars and that for this purpose such and such a quantity of raw materials, power, machinery, etc., should be made available. At the same time, it will set how many work hours (in other words, the number of workers, since the length of the working day is fixed) will be allocated to achieve this goal.

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

Under such conditions, *autonomy* in the production process means the ability to decide how to achieve designated targets with the aid of means that have been defined in general terms. A certain 'give and take' will undoubtedly occur between the 'targets set' and 'means to be used'. The plan must in general prescribe these 'targets' and 'means', for they are the product of other factories. But only the workers of the particular factory can carry out this process of concrete elaboration. By themselves, 'targets set' and 'means of production available for achieving them' do not automatically or exhaustively define all the possible methods that could be used, all the more so since

the plan's definition of the means remains highly general and it cannot specify even all the important 'details'. Spelling out these methods in detail and deciding exactly how an objective will be achieved with the means provided will be the first area in which workers will exercise their autonomy. It is an important field but a *limited* one, and it is essential to be fully aware of its limitations. These limitations stem from (and define) the inevitable framework within which this new type of production will have to *begin*. It will be the task of socialist production constantly to expand this framework and constantly to push back these limitations on autonomy.

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

Autonomy is also limited in relation to available material *means*. The workers of a given enterprise cannot in full autonomy determine the means of production they would prefer to use, for these are but the products of other enterprises or factories. Total autonomy for every factory, in relation to means, would imply that each factory could determine the output of all the others. These various autonomies would immediately cancel one another out. This limitation is, however, less rigid than the first (the limitation in relation to targets). Alterations of its own equipment, as proposed by the user factory, could easily be accommodated by the producer factory without the latter saddling itself with a heavy extra load. On a small scale, this happens even today in integrated engineering factories (car factories, for instance), where a substantial part of the tooling utilized in one shop may be made in another shop of the same factory. Close cooperation between plants making machine tools and plants using them could quickly lead to considerable changes in the means of production currently used.¹¹

[Subsequent possibilities]

Let us now take a look at workers' management at the factory level in its dynamic aspect, i.e. the function of workers' management in *developing and transforming* socialist production. More precisely, let us look at how the development and transformation of socialist production will become the *primary objective* of workers' management. Everything we have suggested so far will now have to be re-examined. In this way we shall see how the limits to autonomy will gradually be pushed back.

The change will be most obvious in relation to the *means* of production. As we have said, socialist society will attack the problem of how consciously to transform the technology it has inherited from capitalism. Under capitalism, production equipment – and, more generally, the means of production – are planned and manufactured *independently* of the user and of his preferences (manufacturers, of course, pretend to take the user's viewpoint into account, but this has little to do with the real user: the worker on the shop floor). But equipment is made to be used productively. The viewpoint of the 'productive consumers' (i.e. those who will *use* the equipment to *produce* the goods) is of primary importance. As the views of those who *make* the equipment are also important, the problem of the structure of the means of production will only be solved by the vital cooperation of these two categories of workers. In an integrated factory this involves permanent contacts between the corresponding shops. At the level of the economy as a whole, it will have to take place through the instauration of normal, permanent contacts between factories and between sectors of production. (This problem is *distinct* from that of overall planning. General planning is concerned with determining a quantitative framework – so much steel and so many hours of labour at one end, so many consumer goods at the other. It does not have to intervene in the form or the type of intermediate products.)

Cooperation will necessarily take two forms. The choice and popularization of the best methods, and the standardization and rationalization of their use, will be achieved through the *horizontal* cooperation of councils, organized according to branch or sector of industry (for instance, textiles, the chemical industry, engineering, electrical supply, etc.). On the other hand, the integration of the viewpoints of those who make and of those who utilize equipment (or, more generally, of those who make and those who utilize intermediate products) will require the *vertical* cooperation of councils representing the successive stages of a productive process (the steel industry and the machine-tool and engineering industries, for instance). In both cases, cooperation will have to be organized on a permanent basis through committees of factory council representatives (or wider conferences of producers) organized both horizontally and vertically.

Considering the problem from this dynamic angle – which ultimately is the only important one – we see at once that the terrain for exercising autonomy has expanded considerably. Already at the level of individual factories (but more significantly at the level of cooperation between factories), the producers are beginning to influence the structure of the means of production. They are, thereby, reaching a position where they are beginning to dominate the work process: they are not only determining its methods but are now also modifying its technological structure.

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

But here, too, looking at things dynamically radically alters one's vision. Modern consumption is characterized by the constant appearance of new products. Factories producing consumer goods will conceive of, receive suggestions about, study, and finally produce such products.

This raises the broader problem of contact between producers and consumers. Capitalist society rests on a complete separation of these two aspects of human activity and on the exploitation of the consumer *qua* consumer. There are not just monetary exploitation (through overcharging) and limitations on one's income. Capitalism claims that it can satisfy people's needs better than any other system in history. But in fact capitalism, if it does not determine these needs themselves, decides upon the method of satisfying them. Consumer preference is only one of numerous variables that can be manipulated by modern sales techniques.

The division between producers and consumers appears most glaringly in relation to the *quality* of goods. This problem is insoluble in any exploiting society, as Daniel Mothé's dialogue between the human-worker and the robot-worker shows: 'Do you think this part's important? – What's it to you? You can always jam it in somehow.'¹² Those who look only at the surface of things see only a commodity as a commodity. They don't see in it a crystallized moment of the class struggle. They see faults or defects, instead of seeing in them the resultant of the worker's constant struggle with himself. Faults or defects embody the worker's struggles against exploitation. They also embody squabbles between different sections of the bureaucracy managing the plant.

The elimination of exploitation will of itself bring about a change in all

this. At work, people will begin to assert their claims as future consumers of what they are producing. In its early phases, however, socialist society will undoubtedly have to instaurate regular forms of contact (other than 'the market') between producers and consumers.

We have assumed, as a starting point for all this, the division of labour inherited from present-day capitalism. But we have also pointed out that, from the very beginning, socialist society cannot survive unless it demolishes this division. This is an enormous subject with which we cannot even begin to deal in this text. Nevertheless, the first benchmarks of a solution can be seen even today. Modern production has destroyed many traditional professional qualifications. It has created universal automatic or semiautomatic machines. It has thereby itself demolished, on its own, the traditional framework for the industrial division of labour. It has given birth to a universal worker who is capable, after a relatively short apprenticeship, of using most existing machines. Once one gets beyond its class aspects, the 'posting' of workers to particular jobs in a big modern factory corresponds less and less to a genuine division of *labour* and more and more to a simple division of tasks. Workers are not allocated to given areas of the production process and then riveted to them because their 'occupational skills' invariably correspond to the 'skills required' by management. They are placed here rather than there because putting a particular worker in a particular place at a particular time happens to suit the personnel officer – or the foreman – or, more prosaically, just because a particular vacancy happened to exist.

Under socialism, factories would have no reason to accept the artificially rigid division of labour now prevailing. There will be every reason to encourage a rotation of workers *between shops and departments* – and between production and office areas. Such a rotation will greatly help workers to manage production in full knowledge of the relevant facts as more and more workers develop firsthand familiarity with what goes on where they work. The same applies to rotation of workers *between various enterprises*, and in particular between 'producing' and 'utilizing' units.

The residues of capitalism's division of labour will gradually have to be eliminated. This overlaps with the general problem of education not only of generations to come but of those adults who were brought up under the previous system. We cannot go into this problem here.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
HEIDELBERG

Simplification and Rationalization of General Economic Problems

[Simplification and rationalization of data]

The functioning of the socialist economy implies that the producers themselves will consciously manage all economic activity. This management will be exercised at all levels, and in particular at the overall or central level. It is completely illusory to believe that either a central bureaucracy left to itself or even a bureaucracy 'controlled' by the workers could guide the economy toward socialism. Such a bureaucracy could only lead society toward new forms of exploitation. It is also wrong to think that 'automatic' objective mechanisms could be established that, like the automatic pilot of a modern jet aircraft, could at each moment direct the economy in the desired direction. It is just as impossible for an 'enlightened' bureaucracy, the mechanisms of a 'true market' (supposedly restored to its pristine and original, precapitalist, purity), or the regulatory control afforded by some electronic supercomputer to achieve such an ideal end. Any plan presupposes a fundamental decision on the rate of growth of the economy, and this in turn depends essentially on decisions concerning the distribution of the social product between investment and consumption. [. . .]

Now, there is no 'objective' rational basis for determining how to distribute the social product. A decision to invest zero per cent of the social product is neither more nor less objectively rational than a decision to invest 90 per cent of it. The only rationality in the matter is the choice people make about their own fate, in full knowledge of the relevant facts. The fixing of plan targets by those who will have to fulfil them is, in the last analysis, the only guarantee of their willing and spontaneous participation and hence of an effective mobilization of individuals around both the management and the expansion of the economy.

But this does not mean that the plan and the management of the economy are 'just political matters'. Socialist planning will base itself on certain rational technical factors. It is in fact the only type of planning that could integrate such factors into a conscious management of the economy. These factors consist of a number of extremely useful and effective 'labour-saving' and 'thought-saving' devices that can be used to simplify the representation of the economy and its laws, thereby allowing the problems of central economic management to be made accessible to all. Workers' management of production (this time at the level of the economy as a whole and not just at the level of a particular factory) will be possible only if management tasks have been enormously simplified, so that the producers and their collective organs are in a position to judge the key issues in an informed way. What is

needed, in other words, is for the vast chaos of today's economic facts and relations to be boiled down to certain propositions that adequately sum up the real problems and choices. These propositions should be few in number. They should be easy to grasp. They should summarize reality without distortion or mystification. If they can do this, they will form an adequate basis for meaningful judgements.

A condensation of this type is *possible*, first, because there is at least a rational outline to the economy; second, because there already exist today certain techniques allowing one to grasp the complexities of economic reality; and finally, because it is now possible to mechanize and to automate all that does not pertain to human decisions in the strict sense.

A discussion of the relevant devices, techniques, and possibilities is therefore indispensable, starting right now. They enable us to carry out a vast clearing of the ground. Without them workers' management would collapse under the weight of the very subject matter it ought to be getting a handle on. The content of such a discussion is in no sense a 'purely technical' one, and at each stage we will be guided by the general principles already outlined here.

[The 'Plan Factory']

A production plan, whether it deals with one factory or the economy as a whole, is a type of reasoning (made up of a great number of secondary arguments). It can be boiled down to two premises and one conclusion. The two premises are the material means initially at one's disposal (equipment, stocks, labour, etc.) and the target one is aiming at (production of so many specified objects and services, within a given period of time). We will refer to these premises as the '*initial conditions*' and the '*ultimate target*'. The 'conclusion' is the path to be followed from initial conditions to ultimate target. In practice this means a certain number of intermediate products to be made within a given period. We will call these conclusions the '*intermediate targets*'.

When passing from simple initial conditions to a simple ultimate target, the intermediate targets can be determined right away. As the initial conditions or the ultimate targets (or both) become more complex, or are more spread out in time, the establishment of intermediate targets becomes more difficult. In the case of the economy as a whole (where there are thousands of different products, many of which can be made by several different processes, and where the manufacture of any given category of products directly or indirectly involves most of the others), one might imagine that the level of complexity makes rational planning (in the sense of an *a priori* determination of the intermediate targets, given the initial conditions and ultimate target) impossible. The apologists for 'free enterprise'

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE LIBRARY

have been proclaiming this doctrine for ages. But it is false.¹³ The problem can be solved and available mathematical techniques in fact allow it to be solved remarkably simply. Once the initial conditions (the economic situation at the start of the planning process) are known and the ultimate target or targets have been consciously set, all planning work (the determination of the intermediate targets) can be reduced to a purely technical task of execution, capable of being mechanized and automated to a very high degree.

The basis of the new methods is the concept of the total interdependence of all sectors of the economy (the fact that everything that one sector utilizes in production is itself the product of one or more other sectors; and the converse fact that every product of a given sector will ultimately be utilized or consumed by one or more other sectors). The idea, which goes back to Quesnay and which formed the basis of Marx's theory of accumulation, has been vastly developed in the past twenty years by a group of American economists around W. Leontief that has succeeded in giving it a statistical formulation that can be applied to a real economy in a state of constant expansion.¹⁴ This interdependence is such that at any given moment (for a given level of technique and a given structure of available equipment) the production of each sector is related, in a relatively stable manner, to the products of other sectors that the first sector utilizes (or 'consumes productively').

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

One could stop at this point if one were dealing with only a single enterprise. Every firm bases itself on calculations of this sort (in fact, on much more detailed ones) whenever, in making decisions about how much to produce or how much to increase production, it buys raw materials, orders machinery, or recruits labour. But when one looks at the economy as a whole, things change. The interdependence of the various sectors has

definite consequences. The *increase* of production in a given sector has repercussions (of varying intensity) on all other sectors and finally on the initial sector itself. For example, an increase in the production of steel immediately requires an increase in the production of coal. But this requires both an increase in certain types of mining equipment and the recruitment of more labour into mining. The increased demand for mining equipment in turn requires *more* steel, and more labour in the steel mills. This in turn leads to a demand for still more coal, etc., etc. For their part, newly hired workers get increased wages and therefore they buy more consumer goods of various kinds. The production of these new goods will require such and such an amount of raw materials, new equipment, etc. (and, again, more coal and steel). The question of how much the demand for nylon stockings would rise in West Virginia or the Basses-Pyrénées if a new blast furnace were to be built in Pennsylvania or the Lorraine is not a joke but one of the central problems to which planners should – and can – respond.

The use of Leontief's matrices, combined with other modern methods such as Koopmans's 'activity analysis'¹⁵ (of which 'operational research' is a specific instance) would, in the case of a socialist economy, allow theoretically exact answers to be given to questions of this type. A matrix is a table on which the technical coefficients (both 'current technical coefficients' and 'technical coefficients of capital') expressing the dependence of each sector upon each of the others are laid out systematically. Every ultimate target that might be chosen is presented as a list of material means to be utilized (and therefore manufactured) in specific amounts, within the period in question. As soon as the ultimate target is chosen, the solution of a system of simultaneous equations enables one to define immediately all the intermediate targets and therefore the tasks to be fulfilled by each sector of the economy.

Solving these problems will be the task of a highly mechanized and automated specific *enterprise*, whose main work will consist of a veritable 'mass production' of various *plans* (*targets*) and of their various *components* (*implications*). This enterprise is the *plan factory*. Its central workshop will, to start with, probably consist of a computer whose 'memory' will store the technical coefficients and the initial productive capacity of each sector. If 'fed' a number of hypothetical targets, the computer will 'produce' the production implication of each target for each sector (including the amount of work to be provided, in each instance, by the 'manpower' sector).

(The division of the economy into some 100 sectors, which roughly corresponds to *present* [1957] computer capacity, is about 'halfway' between its division [by Marx] into two sectors [consumer goods and means of production] and the few thousand sectors that would be required to ensure a perfectly exact representation. Present computer capabilities would probably be sufficient in practice, and could be made more precise, even now, by tackling the problem in several stages.)

Around this central workshop there would be others whose tasks would be to study the distribution and variations of regional production and investment and possible technical optima (given the general interdependence of the various sectors). They would also determine the unit values (equivalences) of different categories of products. [. . .]

Let us not be misunderstood; the role of the 'plan factory' will not be to decide on the plan. The targets of the plan will be determined by society as a whole [. . .]. Before any proposals are voted upon, however, the plan factory will work out and present to society as a whole the implications and the consequences of the plan (or plans) suggested. After a plan has been adopted, the task of the plan factory will be to constantly bring up to date the facts on which the current plan is based, and to draw conclusions from these modifications, informing both the central assembly of councils and the relevant sectors of any alterations in the intermediate targets (and therefore in the production tasks) that might be worth considering.

In none of these instances would those actually working in the plan factory decide anything – except, as in every other factory, the organization of their own work.

The market for consumer goods

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

Planning decisions therefore will relate not to particular items but to the general standard of living (the overall volume of consumption), expressed in terms of the disposable income of each person in a socialist society. They will not delve into the detailed composition of this consumption. [. . .]

Socialist society will have to regulate the pattern of its consumption according to the principle of *consumer sovereignty*, which implies the existence of a real market for consumer goods. The 'general decision' embodied

in the plan will define: (1) what proportion of its overall product society wishes to devote to the satisfaction of individual consumer needs, (2) what proportion it would like to allocate to collective needs ('public consumption'), and (3) what proportion it wants to apply to the development of the productive forces (i.e. investment). But the *structure* of consumption will have to be determined by the demand of consumers themselves. [. . .]

Money, prices, wages, and value

Many absurdities have been spoken about money and its immediate abolition in a socialist society. It should be clear, however, that the role of money is radically transformed from the moment it can no longer be used as a means of *accumulation* (the means of production being owned in common) or as a means of *exerting social pressure* (wages being equal).

People will receive a *token* [*revenu*] in return for what they put into society. These 'tokens' will take the form of units [*signes*], allowing people to organize what they take out of society, spreading it out (1) in time and (2) between different objects and services, exactly as they wish. As we are seeking here to come to grips with realities and are not fighting against words, we see no objection to calling these tokens 'wages' and these units 'money' [. . .].

Under socialism, labour value will be the only rational basis for any kind of social accountancy and the only yardstick having any real meaning for people. As such, it will necessarily serve as the foundation for calculating profitability in the sphere of socialist production. The main objective of making such calculations will be to reduce both the direct and indirect costs of human labour power. Setting the prices of consumer goods on the basis of their labour value would mean that for each person the cost of consumer objects will clearly appear as the equivalent of the labour he himself would have had to expend to produce them (assuming he had both access to the average prevailing equipment and an average social capacity).

It would both simplify and clarify things if the monetary unit was considered the 'net product of an hour of labour' and if this were made the unit of value. It would also be helpful if the hourly wage, equal for all, were a given fraction of this unit, expressing the ratio *private consumption/total net production*. If these steps were taken and thoroughly explained, they would enable the fundamental planning decision (namely, the distribution of the social product between consumption and investment) to be immediately obvious to everyone, and repeatedly drawn to people's attention, every time anyone bought anything. Equally obvious would be the social cost of every object acquired.

Absolute wage equality

Whenever they succeed in expressing themselves independently of the trade-union bureaucracy, working-class aspirations and demands are directed increasingly against hierarchy and wage differentials.¹⁶ Basing itself on this fact, socialist society will introduce absolute equality in the area of wages.

There is no justification, other than naked exploitation, for wage differentials,¹⁷ whether these reflect differing professional qualifications or differences in productivity. If an individual himself advanced the costs of his professional training and if society considered him 'an enterprise', the recovery of those costs, spread over a working lifetime, would at most 'justify', at the extremes of the wage spectrum, a differential of 2:1 (between sweeper and neurosurgeon). Under socialism, training costs will be advanced by society (they often are, even today), and the question of their 'recovery' will not arise. As for productivity, it depends (already today) much less on bonuses and incentives and much more on the coercions exercised, on the one hand, by machines and supervisors and, on the other, by the discipline of production, imposed by primary working groups in the workshop. Socialist society could not increase productivity by economic constraints without resorting again to all the capitalist paraphernalia of norms, supervision, etc. Labour discipline will flow (as it already does, in part, today) from the self-organization of primary groups in each workshop, from the mutual cooperation and supervision among the factories' different shops, from gatherings of producers in different factories or different sectors of the economy. As a general rule, the primary group in a workshop ensures the discipline of any particular individual. Anyone who proves incorrigible can be made to leave that particular shop. It would then be up to this recalcitrant individual to seek entry into another primary group of workers and to gain their acceptance or else to remain jobless.

Wage equality will give a real meaning to the market in consumer goods, every individual being assured for the first time of an equal vote. It will abolish countless conflicts, both in everyday life and in production, and will enable an extraordinary cohesion to develop among working people. It will destroy at its very roots the whole mercantile monstrosity of capitalism (both private and bureaucratic), the commercialization of individuals, that whole universe where one does not earn what one is worth but where one is worth what one earns. A few years of wage equality and little will be left of the present-day mentality of individuals.

The fundamental decision

The fundamental decision, in a socialist economy, is the one whereby society as a whole determines what it wants (i.e. the ultimate targets of its plan).

This decision concerns two basic propositions. Given the 'initial conditions' of the economy, how much time does society want to devote to production? And how much of the total product does it want to see devoted respectively to private consumption, public consumption, and investment?

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

Socialist society will also be the first society capable of deciding rationally how society's product should be divided between consumption and investment. (We leave aside for now the problem of public consumption.) Under private capitalism, this distribution takes place in an absolutely blind fashion and one would seek in vain any 'rationality' underlying what determines investment. (In his major work, which is devoted to this theme – and after a moderate use of differential equations – Keynes comes up with the conclusion that the main determinants of investment are the 'animal spirits' of entrepreneurs. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* [1936], pp. 161–2.) The idea that the volume of investment is determined primarily by the rate of interest (and that the latter results from the interplay of the 'real forces of productivity and thrift') was long ago demolished by academic economists themselves. (See, for example, Joan Robinson's *The Rate of Interest and Other Essays* [1952; reprinted, London: Hyperion, 1981].) In bureaucratic capitalist societies, the volume of investment is also decided quite arbitrarily, and the central bureaucracy in these societies has never been able to justify its choices except through monotonous recitations of litanies about the 'priority of heavy industry'. (One would seek in vain through the voluminous writings of Mr Charles Bettelheim for any attempt to justify the rate of accumulation 'chosen' by the Russian bureaucracy. The 'socialism' of such 'theoreticians' not only implies that Stalin [or Khrushchev] alone can know. It also implies that such knowledge, by its very nature, cannot be communicated to the rest of humanity. In another country, and in other times, this was known as the *Führerprinzip*.) Even if there were a rational, 'objective' basis for making a central decision on this matter, the decision arrived at would be *ipso facto* irrational if it was reached in the absence of those primarily concerned, namely, the members of society. Any decision made in this way would reproduce the basic contradiction of all exploiting regimes. It would treat people in the plan as just one

variable of predictable behaviour among others and as theoretical 'objects'. It would soon lead to treating them as objects in real life, too. Such a policy would contain the seeds of its own failure: instead of encouraging the participation of the producers in carrying out the plan, it would irrevocably alienate them from a plan that was not of their choosing. There is no 'objective' rationality allowing one to decide, by means of mathematical formulae, about the future of society, work, consumption, and accumulation. The only rationality in these realms is the living reason of mankind, the decisions of ordinary people concerning their own fate.

But these decisions will not come from a toss of the dice. They will be based upon a complete clarification of the problem and they will be made in full knowledge of the relevant facts. This will be possible because there exists, for any given level of technique, a definite relation between a given amount of investment and the resulting increase in production. This relation is nothing other than the application to the economy as a whole of the 'technical coefficients of capital' we spoke of earlier. A given investment in steelworks will result in such and such an increase in what steelworks turn out – and a given *overall* investment in production will result in such and such a net increase in the overall social product. Therefore, a certain *rate* of accumulation will allow a certain *rate* of increase of the social product (and therefore of the standard of living or of the amount of leisure). Finally, a particular *fraction* of the product devoted to accumulation will also result in a particular *rate* of increase of living standards.

The overall problem can therefore be posed in the following terms. A large immediate increase in consumption is possible – but it would imply a significant cutback on further increases in the years to come. On the other hand, people might prefer to choose a more limited immediate increase in living standards, which would allow the social product (and hence living standards) to increase at the rate of x per cent per annum in the years to come. And so on. 'The antinomy between the present and the future', to which the apologists of private capitalism and of the bureaucracy are constantly referring, would still be with us. But it would be *laid out clearly*. And society itself would settle the matter, fully aware of the setting and of the implications of its decision. [. . .]

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

- 1 the productive implications for each sector of industry, and as far as possible the tasks to be completed by each enterprise;
- 2 the amount of work involved for everybody;
- 3 the level of consumption during the initial period;
- 4 the amount of resources to be devoted to public consumption and to investment; and
- 5 the rate of increase of future consumption.

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

The fundamental process of decision therefore will take the following form. Starting from below, there would be discussions in the general assemblies. Initial proposals would emanate from the workers' councils of various enterprises and would deal with their own productive possibilities in the period to come. The plan factory would then regroup these various proposals, pointing out which ones were mutually incompatible or entailed undesirable effects on other sectors. It would elaborate a series of achievable targets, grouping them as far as possible in terms of their concrete implications. (Proposal A implies that factory X will increase production by r per cent next year with the help of additional equipment Y. Proposal B, on the other hand, implies . . .) There would then be a full discussion of the various overall proposals, throughout the general assemblies and by all the workers' councils, possibly with counterproposals and a repetition of the procedure described. A final discussion would then lead to a simple majority vote in the general assemblies of each enterprise.

The Management of the Economy

We have spelled out the implications of workers' management at the level of a particular factory. These consist in the abolition of any separate managerial apparatus and in the performance of managerial jobs by the workers themselves, organized in workers' councils and in general assemblies of one or more shops or offices, or of a whole enterprise.

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

What we have outlined in the previous sections shows that democratic management is perfectly feasible. Its basic assumption is the clarification of data and people's utilization of what modern techniques have now made possible. It implies the conscious use of a series of devices and mechanisms (such as a genuine consumer 'market', wage equality, the connections established between price and value – and, of course, the plan factory) combined

with real knowledge concerning economic reality. Together, these will help clear the ground. The major part of planning is made up simply of tasks of execution and could safely be left to highly mechanized or automated offices, which would have no political or decisional role whatsoever and would confine themselves to placing before society a variety of feasible plans and their full respective implications for everyone, both from the standpoint of production and from that of consumption.

This general clearing of the ground having been achieved, and coherent possibilities having been presented to the people, the final choice will lie in their hands. Everyone will participate in deciding the ultimate targets 'in full knowledge of the relevant facts', i.e. knowing the implications of his choice for himself (both as producer and as consumer). The elements of the plan will begin as proposals emanating from various enterprises. They will be elaborated by the plan factory as a series of possible compatible plans. Finally, this spectrum of plans will be brought back before the general assemblies of each enterprise where they will be discussed and voted on.

Once adopted, a given plan provides the framework of economic activities for a given period of time. It establishes a starting point for economic life. But in a socialist society, the plan will not *dominate* economic life. It is only a starting point, to be constantly re-examined and modified as necessary. Neither the economic life of society – nor its life overall – can be based on a dead technical rationality, given once and for all. Society cannot alienate itself from its own decisions. It is not only that real life will almost of necessity diverge, in many aspects, from the 'most perfect' plan in the world. It is also that the workers' self-managerial activity will constantly tend to alter, both directly and indirectly, the basic data and targets of the plan. New products, new means of production, new methods, new problems, new difficulties, and new solutions will constantly be emerging. Working times will be reduced. Prices will fall, entailing consumer reactions and displacements of demand. Some of these modifications will affect only a single factory, others several factories, and yet others, no doubt, the economy as a whole. (From this angle – and if they weren't false in the first place – Russian figures that show that year after year the targets of the plan have been fulfilled to 101 per cent would provide the severest possible indictment of the Russian economy and of Russian society. They would signify, in effect, that during a given five-year period *nothing* happened in the country, that not a single new idea arose in anyone's mind – or else that Stalin, in his wisdom, had foreseen all such ideas and incorporated them in advance in the plan, allowing – in his kindness – inventors to savour the pleasures of illusory discovery.) The 'plan factory' therefore will not operate just once every five years; it will have to tackle some problem or another daily.

All this deals mainly with the *form* of workers' management of the economy and with the mechanisms and institutions that will ensure that it

functions in a democratic manner. These forms will allow society to give to the management of the economy the *content* it chooses. In a narrower sense, they will enable society to orient economic development freely.

The content of the management of the economy

Everything we have said indicates that the direction chosen will be radically different from that proposed by the best-intentioned ideologists or philanthropists of modern society. All such ideologists (whether 'Marxist' or bourgeois) accept as self-evident that the ideal economy is one that allows the most rapid possible expansion of the productive forces and, as a corollary, the greatest possible reduction of the working day. This idea, considered in absolute terms, is absolutely absurd. It epitomizes the whole mentality, psychology, logic, and metaphysics of capitalism, its reality as well as its schizophrenia. 'Work is hell. It must be reduced.' Mr Harold Wilson and Mr Nikita Khrushchev have nothing to offer people besides cars and butter. The population must therefore be made to feel that it can be happy only if the roads are choked with cars or if it can 'catch up with American butter production within the next three years'. And when people acquire the said cars and the said butter, all that will be left for them to do will be to commit suicide, which is just what they do in the 'ideal' country called Sweden. This 'acquisitive' mentality that capitalism engenders, which engenders capitalism, without which capitalism could not operate, and which capitalism pushes to the point of paroxysm might just conceivably have been a useful aberration during a certain phase of human development. But this way of thinking will die along with capitalism. Socialist society will not be this absurd race after percentage increments in production. This will *not* be its basic concern.

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

The Management of Society

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

A central organ that will be the expression of the workers themselves will be needed in order to ensure the general tasks of economic coordination, in as much as they were not dealt with by the plan itself – or more precisely, in as much as the plan will have to be frequently or constantly amended (the very decision to suggest that it should be amended would have to be initiated by someone). Such a body will also coordinate activities in other areas of social life that have little or nothing to do with general economic planning. This central body will be the direct emanation of the workers' councils and the local general assemblies themselves. It will consist of a central assembly of delegates. The assembly itself will elect, from within its own ranks, a central council, called 'the government'.

This network of general assemblies and councils is all that is left of the *State* or of *power* in a socialist society. It is the *whole* State and the *only* embodiment of power. There are no other institutions that could manage, direct, or make binding decisions about people's lives.

To convince people that there would be no other 'State' lurking in the background we must show:

- 1 that such a pattern of organization can embrace the entire population of the nation, not just in industry; and
- 2 that institutions of the type described can organize, direct, and coordinate all those social activities that the population felt needed to be organized, directed, and coordinated (in particular noneconomic activities), in other words, that they could fulfil *all* the functions needed of a socialist 'State' (which should not be confused with those of a modern State).

We will then have to discuss what the significations of the 'State', 'parties' and 'politics' would be in such a society.

The councils: exclusive and exhaustive form of organization for the whole population

Setting up workers' councils will create no particular problems in relation to *industry* (taking the term in its widest sense to include manufacture, trans-

port, communications, building, mining, energy production, public services and public works, etc.). The revolutionary transformation of society will in fact be based on the establishment of such councils and would be impossible without it.

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

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

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

In a country such as France – classically considered 'backward' as far as the numerical importance of its peasantry is concerned – the workers' power will not have to fear a 'wheat strike'. It will not have to organize punitive expeditions into the countryside. Precisely because the peasant is concerned with his own interests, he will have no cause to quarrel with a State that supplies him with gas, electricity, fertilizers, insecticides, and spare parts.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WELBOURNE LIBRARY

Peasants would actively oppose such an administration only if pushed to the limit, either by exploitation or by an absurd policy of forced collectivization. The socialist organization of the economy would mean an *immediate* improvement in the economic status of most peasants, if only through the abolition of that specific kind of exploitation they are subjected to through middlemen. As for forced collectivization, it is the very antithesis of socialist policy in the realm of agriculture. The collectivization of agriculture could come about only as the result of an organic development within the peasantry itself, helped along by technical developments. Under no circumstances could it be imposed through direct or indirect (economic) coercion.

A socialist society will start by recognizing the rights of the peasants to the widest autonomy in the management of their own affairs. It will invite them to organize themselves into rural communes, based on geographical or cultural units and comprising approximately equal populations. Each such commune will have, both in relation to the rest of society and in relation to its own organizational structure, the status of an enterprise. Its sovereign organ therefore will be the general assembly of peasants and its representational unit, the peasant council. Rural communes and their councils will be in charge of local self-administration. They alone will decide when and how they want to form producers' cooperatives and under what conditions. In relation to the overall plan, it will be the rural communes and their councils that will be responsible to the government, and not individual peasants. Communes will undertake to deliver a certain percentage of their produce (or a given amount of a specific product) in exchange for given amounts of money or means of production. The rural communes themselves will decide how these obligations and payments ought to be allocated among their own members. [. . .]

What about groups of workers involved in *services* of various kinds (from commercial, banking, and insurance company staff to workers in entertainment to all the ex-State administrators)?¹⁸ There is no reason why the pattern of their self-organization should not resemble that pertaining to industry as a whole. And what about the thousand-and-one petty trades existing in towns (shopkeepers, 'personal services', artisans, some of the 'liberal professions', etc.)? Here the pattern of organization could resemble what we have outlined for an 'atomized' occupation such as agriculture. A working-class power will never seek to socialize these occupations by force. It will only require that these categories group themselves into associations or cooperatives, which will at one and the same time constitute their representative political organs and their responsible units in relation to the management of the economy as a whole. There will be no question, for instance, of socialized industry individually supplying each particular shop or artisan. Instead, it will supply the cooperatives that these shopkeepers or artisans will be

members of, and will entrust to these collectives the job of organizing within their own ranks. At the political level, people in these occupations will seek representation through councils or they won't be represented at all, for there won't be any elections of either the Western or Russian types.

These solutions present serious shortcomings when compared with industrially based workers' councils – or even when compared with rural communes. Workers' councils or rural communes are not based primarily on an *occupation* (when they are still so based, this would reflect their weakness rather than their strength). They are based on a *working* unity and on a shared *life*. In other words, workers' councils and rural communes represent organic social units. A cooperative of artisans or of petty traders, geographically scattered and living and working separately from one another, will only be based on a rather narrow community of interests. This fragmentation is a legacy of capitalism that socialist society ought to eliminate as soon as possible. These occupations are overcrowded today. Under socialism, some of the members of these strata will be absorbed into other occupations. Society will grant funds to the remainder to enable them to organize into larger, self-managed units.

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

The councils: universal form of organization for social activities

The basic units of social organization, as we have envisaged them so far, will not merely manage *production*. They will, at the same time and primarily, be organs for popular self-management *in all its aspects*. On the one hand, they will be organs of local self-administration and, on the other, they will be the *only* bases of the central power, which will exist only as a federation or regrouping of all the councils.

To say that a workers' council will be an organ of popular self-administration (and not just an organ of workers' management of

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE LIBRARY

production) is to recognize that a factory or office is not just a productive unit, but is also a social cell, and that it will become the primary *locus* of individual 'socialization'. Although this varies from country to country and from workplace to workplace, myriad activities other than just earning a living take place around it (canteens, cooperatives, vacation retreats, sports clubs, libraries, rest homes, collective outings, dances) – activities that allow the most important human ties (both private and 'public') to become established. To the extent that the average person is today active in 'public' affairs, it is more likely to be through some trade-union or political activity related to work than in a capacity as an abstract 'citizen', putting a ballot into a box once every few years. Under socialism, the transformation of the relations of production and of the very nature of work will enormously reinforce, for each worker, the positive significance of the working collective to which he belongs.

Workers' councils and rural communes will absorb all of today's 'municipal' functions. They also will take over many others, which the monstrous centralization of the modern capitalist State has removed from the hands of local groups with the sole aim of consolidating the control of the ruling class and of its central bureaucracy over the whole population. Local councils, for instance, will take over such city and county services and departments as the direct application of 'policing' powers (by detachments of armed workers assigned in rotation), the administration of local justice, and the local control of primary education.

The two forms of regroupment – productive and geographical – seldom coincide today. Peoples' homes are at variable distances from where they work. Where the scatter is small, as in a number of industrial towns or industrial suburbs (or in many rural communes), the management of production and local self-administration will be undertaken by the same general assemblies and by the same councils. Where home and workplace do not overlap, geographically based *local* councils (soviets) will have to be instituted, directly representing both the inhabitants of a given area and the enterprises in the area. Initially, such geographically based local councils will be necessary in many places. One might envisage them as 'collateral' institutions in charge of local affairs. They will collaborate at the local and national levels with the councils of producers, which alone represent the seat of power.

(Although the Russian word 'soviet' means 'council', one should not confuse the workers' councils we have been describing in this text with even the earliest Russian soviets. The workers' councils are based on one's place of work. They can play both a political role and a role in the industrial management of production. In its essence, a workers' council is a universal organ. The 1905 Petrograd Soviet (Council) of Workers' Deputies, although the product of a general strike and although exclusively proletarian in composition, remained a purely political organ. The soviets of 1917 were

as a rule geographically based. They too were purely political institutions, in which all social layers opposed to the old regime formed a united front [see Trotsky's 1905 and his *History of the Russian Revolution*]. Their role corresponded to the 'backwardness' of the Russian economy and of Russian society at the time as well as to the 'bourgeois-democratic' aspects of the 1917 revolution. In this sense, they belonged to the past. The normal form of working-class representation in the present age undoubtedly is the workers' council.)

The problems created by the gaps between these two types of councils could soon be overcome if one were to organize changes in workers' living places. This is but a small aspect of an important problem that will hang over the general orientation of socialist society for decades to come. Underlying these questions are all the economic, social, and human problems of urban planning in the deepest sense of the term and, ultimately, the very problem of the division between town and country. It is not for us here to venture into these fields. All we can say is that, from the very start, a socialist society will have to tackle these problems as *total* problems, for they have an effect on every aspect of peoples' lives and on society's own economic, political, and cultural purpose.

What we have said about local self-administration also applies to *regional* self-administration. Regional federations of workers' councils or rural communes will be in charge of coordinating these bodies at a regional level and of organizing activities best tackled at such a level.

The industrial organization of the 'State'

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

In class societies, and in particular under classical nineteenth-century 'liberal' capitalism, the ultimate function of the State was to guarantee the maintenance of existing social relations through the exercise of a legal monopoly on violence. In this sense Lenin was right, against the reformists of his day, to adopt Engels's description of the State as nothing more than 'special bodies of armed men, and prisons'.¹⁹ In the course of a socialist revolution, there was no doubt as to the fate of this State: its apparatus was to be smashed, the 'special detachments of armed men' dissolved and replaced by the arming of the people, and the permanent bureaucracy abolished and replaced by elected and revocable officials.

Under today's crisis-ridden capitalism, increasing economic concentration and the increasing concentration of all aspects of social life (with the corresponding need for the ruling class to submit everything to its control

and supervision) have led since Lenin's time to an enormous growth of the State apparatus, its functions, and its bureaucracy. The State is no longer just a coercive apparatus that has elevated itself 'above' society. It is the hub of a whole series of mechanisms whereby society functions *from day to day*. At the limit, the present-day State underlies *all* social activity, as in the fully developed bureaucratic-capitalist regimes of Russia and the satellite countries. Even in the West, the State goes beyond the mere exercise of 'power' in the narrow sense and takes on an ever-increasing role in the *management* and *control* not only of the economy but of a host of social activities. Parallel with all this, the State takes on a large number of functions that in themselves could perfectly well be carried out by other bodies, but which either have become useful instruments of control or imply the mobilization of considerable resources that the State alone possesses.

In many people's minds the myth of the 'State' as the 'incarnation of the Absolute Idea' (which Engels mocked a century ago) has been replaced by another myth, the myth of the State as the inevitable incarnation of centralization and of the 'technical rationalization' required by modern social life. This has had two main effects. It has led some people to consider outmoded, utopian, or inapplicable the conclusions Marx, Engels, and Lenin have drawn from their theoretical analysis of the State and from the experience of the revolutionary events of 1848, 1871, or 1905. It has led others to swallow the reality of the modern Russian State, which simultaneously epitomizes (not in what it hides – police terror and the concentration camps – but in what it officially proclaims, in its Constitution) the complete and total negation of previous Marxist conceptions of what the socialist 'State' might be like and exhibits a monstrous increase in those very features of capitalist society that were criticized by Marx or Lenin (the total separation of rulers and ruled, permanent officialdom, greater privileges for the few than were ever allowed to the elite in any bourgeois State, etc.).

But this very evolution of the modern State contains the seed of a solution. The modern State has become a gigantic enterprise – by far the most important enterprise in modern society. It can exercise its *managerial* functions only to the extent that it has created a whole network of organs of *execution*, within which work has become collective, subject to a division of labour, and specialized. What has happened here is the same as what has happened to the management of production in particular enterprises. But it has happened on a much vaster scale. In their overwhelming majority, today's governmental departments carry out only specific and limited tasks. They are 'enterprises', specializing in certain types of work. Some are socially necessary. Others are purely parasitic or are necessary only in order to maintain the class structure of society. The 'powers that be' have no more intrinsic connection with the work of 'their' departments than they have, say,

with the production of automobiles. The notion of 'power' or 'administrative rights' that remains appended to what are in fact a series of 'public services' is a juridical legacy, without real content. Its only purpose is to shield from criticism the arbitrary and irresponsible behaviour of those at the top of various bureaucratic pyramids.²⁰

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

1 The explicit transformation of these 'administrative' departments into *enterprises* having the same status as any other enterprise. In many of these new enterprises the mechanization and automation of work could be systematically developed to a considerable degree.

2 The *management* of these enterprises will be through workers' councils, representing those who work there. These office workers, like all others, will determine autonomously the organization of their own work. (The formation of workers' councils of State employees was one of the demands of the Hungarian workers' councils.)

3 The function of these enterprises will be *confined* to the execution of the tasks assigned to them by the representative institutions of society.

We have seen that the 'plan factory' will be organized in this way. The same will apply to whatever remains or could be used of any current structures relating to *the economy* (foreign trade, agriculture, finance, industry, etc.). Current State functions that are already *industrialized* (public works, public transport, communications, public health, and social security) will be similarly organized. And the same goes for *education*.

The central power: the assembly and the governmental council

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

1 the material basis of authority and coercion, 'the specialized bands of armed men and prisons' (in other words, the army and the law);

2 foreign and domestic 'politics', in the narrow sense (in other words, the problems that might arise for a working-class power if it was confronted with internal opposition or with the persistence of hostile exploiting regimes in other countries);

3 real politics: the overall vision, coordination, and general purpose and direction of social life.

Concerning *the army*, it is obvious that 'the specialized bands of armed men' will be dissolved and then replaced by the armed populace. Workers in factories, offices, and rural communes will constitute the units of a nonpermanent, territorially based militia, each council being in charge of policing its own area. Regional regroupings will enable local units to become integrated and will allow the rational use of heavier armaments. The extent to which 'strategic' types of weapons (which can be used only on a centralized basis) will remain necessary cannot be decided *a priori*. If it proved necessary, each council would probably contribute a contingent to the formation of certain central units, which would be under the control of the central assembly of councils.

Neither the means nor the overall conception of war can be copied from those of an imperialist country. What we have said about capitalist technology is valid for military technique: there is no neutral military technique, there is no 'A-bomb for socialism'. Philippe Guillaume has clearly shown (in 'La Guerre et notre époque', *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 3 and 5-6 [July 1949 and March 1950]) that a proletarian revolution of necessity will have to draw up its own strategy and methods suitable to its social and human objectives. The need for so-called strategic weapons does not go without saying for a revolutionary power.

As for the *administration of justice*, it will be in the hands of rank-and-file bodies. Each council will act as a 'lower court' in relation to 'offences' committed in its jurisdiction. Individual rights will be guaranteed by procedural rules established by the central assembly, and could also include the right of appeal to the regional councils or to the central assembly itself. There would be no question of a 'penal code' or of prisons, the very notion of 'punishment' being absurd from a socialist point of view. Judgements could aim only at re-educating the social delinquent and at reintegrating him into his social surroundings. Deprivation of freedom has a meaning only if it is judged that a particular individual constitutes a permanent threat to others (and in that case what is needed is not a penitentiary but 'pedagogical' and 'medical' - 'psychiatric' - institutions).

Political problems - in the narrow as well as in the broader sense - concern the whole population, and therefore only the population as a whole is in a position to solve them. But people can solve them only if they are organized to this end. (At the present time, everything is devised so as to prevent people from dealing with such problems. People are conned into believing that the sole possessors of solutions to political problems are the politicians, those specialists of the universal, whose most universal attribute is precisely their ignorance of any particular reality.)

This organization will be made up first of all of the workers' councils and the general assemblies of each particular enterprise, the vital collective setting within which there can be a confrontation of views and an elabora-

tion of informed political opinions. They will be the ultimate sovereign authorities for all political decisions. But there will also be a central institution, directly emanating from these grass-roots organizations, namely, the central assembly of councils. The existence of such a body is necessary, not only because some problems require an immediate decision (even if such a decision may subsequently be reversed by the population), but more particularly because preliminary checking, clarification, and elaboration of the facts are almost always necessary before any meaningful decision can be made. To ask the people as a whole to voice their opinions without such preparation would often be a mystification and a negation of democracy (because it would eliminate the possibility of people deciding in full knowledge of the relevant facts). There must be a framework for discussing problems and for submitting them to popular decision - or even for suggesting that they should be discussed. These are not just 'technical' functions. They are *deeply political*, and the body that would initiate them would be a *central power* - although very different in its structure and role from any contemporary central body - that socialist society could not do without.

The real problem is not whether such a body should exist. It is how to organize it in such a manner that it no longer incarnates the alienation of political power in society and the vesting of authority in the hands of specialized institutions, separate from the population as a whole. The problem is to make any central body into the expression and instrument of the central power. We think this is perfectly possible under modern conditions.

The central assembly of councils will be composed of delegates elected directly by the general assemblies of the grass-roots organs (or by larger geographical or federated groups of these organs, enterprises, rural communes, etc.). These people will be revocable at all times by the bodies that elected them. *They will remain at work*, as will delegates to the local workers' councils. Delegates to the central assembly will meet in plenary session as often as necessary. In meeting twice a week, or during one week each month, they will almost certainly get through more work than any present legislature (which gets through hardly any). At frequent intervals (perhaps once a month) they will have to give an account of their mandate to those who had elected them. (In a country like France, such an assembly could consist of 1,000 or 2,000 delegates [one delegate per 20,000 or 10,000 workers]. A compromise would have to be reached between two requirements: as a *working* body, the central assembly of councils should not be too large, but on the other hand it must afford the most direct and most broadly based representation of the people, areas, and organs of which it is the outcome.)

Those elected to the central assembly will elect from within their own ranks - or will appoint to act in rotation - a central governmental council,

composed perhaps of a few dozen members. The tasks of this body will be restricted to preparing the work of the central assembly of councils, acting in its stead when it is not in session, and convening the assembly for emergency sessions if necessary.

If this governmental council exceeded its jurisdiction and made a decision that could or should have been submitted to the central assembly, or if it made any unacceptable decisions, these could immediately be rescinded by the next meeting of the central assembly, which could also take any other necessary measures, up to and including the 'dissolution' of its own council. Likewise, if the central assembly made any decision that exceeded its jurisdiction, or that went against the will of the local workers' councils or the local general assemblies, it will be up to those bodies to take any steps necessary, beginning with the revocation of their delegates to the central assembly. Neither the central council nor the central assembly could persevere in unacceptable practices (they have no power of their own, they are revocable, and in the last analysis, the population is armed). But if the central assembly allowed its council to exceed its rights – or if members of local assemblies allowed their delegates to the central assembly to exceed their authority – nothing could be done. The population *can* exercise political power only if it *wants* to. The organization proposed merely ensures that the population *could* exercise such power, if it wanted to.

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

All this will be radically changed in a socialist society. Exploitation having been eliminated, the content of politics will be the better organization of our common life. An immediate result will be a different attitude on the part of

ordinary people toward public affairs. Political problems will be everyone's problems, whether they relate to where one works or deal with national issues. People will begin to feel that their concerns have a real impact, and perceptible results should soon be obvious to everyone. The method of expression of the new politics will be geared toward making real problems accessible to everyone. The gulf separating 'political affairs' from people's everyday lives will be completely eliminated.

All this warrants some comment. Modern sociologists often claim that the content of modern politics and its modes of expression are inevitable. They believe that the separation of politics from life is due to irreversible technical changes that make any real democracy impossible.²¹ It is alleged that the content of politics – namely, the direction and management of society – has become highly complex, embracing an extraordinary mass of data and problems, each of which can be mastered only through advanced specialization. All this allegedly being so, it is proclaimed as self-evident that these problems could never be put to the public in any intelligible way – or only by simplifying them to a degree that would distort them altogether. Why be surprised then that ordinary people take no more interest in politics than they do in differential calculus?

If these 'arguments' – presented as the very latest in political sociology but in fact as old as the world (Plato discusses them at length, and his *Protagoras* is in part devoted to them) – prove anything, it is not that democracy is a utopian illusion but that the *very management of society*, by whatever means, has become impossible. The politician, according to these premises, would have to be the Incarnation of Absolute and Total Knowledge. No technical specialization, however advanced, entitles its possessor to master areas other than his own. An assembly of technicians, each the highest authority in his particular field, would have no competence (as an assembly of technicians) to solve anything. Only one individual could comment on any specific point, and no one would be in a position to comment on any general problem.

Indeed, modern society is not managed by technicians as such (and never could be). Those who manage it do not incarnate Absolute Knowledge – but, rather, generalized incompetence. In fact, modern society is hardly managed at all – it merely drifts. Just like the top management of the bureaucratic apparatus at the head of some big factory, a modern political 'leadership' only renders verdicts – and thoroughly arbitrary ones at that. It decides between the opinions of the various technical departments that are designed to 'assist' it, but over which it has very little control. In this, our rulers feel the repercussions in their own social system and experience the same political alienation they impose on the rest of society. The chaos of their own social organization and the narrow development of each branch for its own exclusive ends render impossible a rational exercise of their own power – even in their own terms.²²

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE LIBRARY

We discuss this sophism because it puts us on the road to an important truth. In the case of politics as in the case of production, people tend to blame modern technique and modern 'technicization' in general instead of seeing that the problems stem from a *specifically capitalist technology*. In politics as in production, capitalism does not only mean the use of technically 'neutral' means for capitalist ends. It also means the creation and development of *specific* techniques, aimed at ensuring the exploitation of the producers – or the oppression, mystification, and political alienation and manipulation of citizens in general. At the level of production, socialism will mean the conscious transformation of technology. Technique will be put in the service of the people. On the political level, socialism will imply a similar transformation: *technique will be put in the service of democracy*.

Political technique is based essentially on the techniques of information and of communication. We are here using the term 'technique' in the widest sense (the *material means* of information and communication comprise only a part of the corresponding techniques). To place the *technique of information* at the service of democracy does not only mean to put material means of expression in the hands of the people (essential as this may be). Nor does it mean the dissemination of *all* information, or of *any* information whatsoever. It means first and foremost to put at the disposal of mankind the elements necessary to enable people to decide in full knowledge of the relevant facts. This means that each person will receive a faithful translation of essential data relating to the problems that will have to be decided upon. This information will be expressed in the form of a finite number of succinctly stated and meaningful details. With respect to the plan factory, we have given a specific example of how information could be used so as vastly to increase people's areas of freedom. In this case, genuine information would not end up burying everyone under whole libraries of textbooks on economics, technology, and statistics: the information that would result from this would be strictly nil. The information provided by the plan factory would be *compact, significant, sufficient, and true*. Everyone will know what he will have to contribute and the level of consumption he will enjoy if this or that variant of the plan is adopted. This is how technique (in this instance, economic analysis, statistics, and computers) can be put in the service of democracy in a key area. There is no 'cybernetic politics' that could tell us how to make a decision; only people can determine the elements required to make decisions.

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

In fact, there are several ways of envisaging and achieving representative democracy. A legislature is one form. Councils are another, and it is difficult to see how political alienation could arise in a council system operating according to its own rules. If modern techniques of communication were put in the service of democracy, the areas where representative democracy would remain necessary would narrow considerably. Material distances are smaller in the modern world than they were in Attica in the fifth century BCE. At that time, the voice range of the orator – and hence the number of people he could reach – was limited by the functional capacity of his vocal cords. Today it is unlimited.²³ In the realm of communicating ideas, distances have not only narrowed – they have disappeared. If society felt it were necessary, tomorrow it could establish a general assembly of the whole population in any modern country. Closed-circuit radio and television hookups could easily link a vast number of general assemblies, in various factories, offices, or rural communes. Similar, but more limited, hookups could be established in a vast number of cases. In any case, the sessions of the central assembly or of its council could easily be televised. This, combined with the revocability of all delegates, would readily ensure that any central institution remained under the permanent control of the population. It would profoundly alter the very notion of 'representation'. (It would certainly be amusing to televise today's parliamentary sessions; this would be an excellent way of lowering sales of TV sets.)

It might be claimed that the problem of numbers remains and that people would never be able to express themselves in a reasonable amount of time. This is not a valid argument. There would rarely be an assembly of over twenty people where everyone would want to speak, for the very good reason that when there is something to be decided upon there is not an infinite number of options or an infinite number of arguments. In unhampered rank-and-file workers' gatherings (convened, for instance, to decide on a strike) there have never been 'too many' speeches. The two or three fundamental opinions having been voiced, and various arguments having been exchanged, a decision is soon reached.

The length of speeches, moreover, often varies inversely with the weight of their content. Russian leaders sometimes talk on for four hours at Party Congresses without saying anything. The speech of the Ephor that persuaded the Spartans to launch the Peloponnesian War occupies twenty-one lines of Thucydides (1.86). For an account of the laconicism of revolutionary assemblies, see Trotsky's accounts of the Petrograd soviet of 1905²⁴ – or accounts of the meetings of factory representatives in Budapest in 1956 (*S. ou B.*, 21 [March 1957], pp. 91–2).

People bemoan the fact that the size of the modern 'city' compared with those of yesterday (tens of millions rather than tens of thousands) renders direct democracy impossible. They are doubly blind. They do not see, first,

THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE LIBRARY

that modern society has recreated the very milieu (the workplace) where such democracy could be reinstaurated. Nor do they see that modern society has created and will continue to create for an indefinite period of time the technical means for a genuine democracy on a massive scale. They envisage the only solution to the problems of the supersonic age in the horse-and-buggy terms of parliamentary political machinery. And they then conclude that democracy has become 'impossible'. They claim to have made a 'new' analysis – and they have ignored what is *really* new in our epoch: the material possibilities of at last freely transforming the world through technique, and through the proletariat, which is its living vehicle.

The 'State', 'parties', and 'politics'

What will the 'State', 'politics', and 'parties' consist of in such a society? We have seen that the remnants of a 'State' will still exist in those instances where there will not immediately be a pure and simple 'administration of things', where there will still be the possibility of coercion and constraints against individuals or groups, where the majority will still prevail over the minority, and where, therefore, limitations on individual freedom persist. There will no longer be a 'State' to the extent that the bodies exercising power will be none other than the productive units or local organizations of the whole population, that the institutions organizing social life will be but one aspect of that life itself, and that what remained of central bodies will be under the direct and permanent control of the grass-roots organizations. This will be the starting point. Social development cannot but bring about a rapid reduction ('withering away') of the 'statist' features of social organization: the reasons for exercising constraints gradually will disappear, and the field of individual freedom will enlarge. (Needless to say, we are not talking here about formal 'democratic freedoms', which a socialist society will immediately and vastly expand, but about substantive freedoms: not only the right to live but the right to do what one wants with one's life.)

Freed from all the rubbish and mystifications currently surrounding it, politics in such a society will be nothing but the collective search for, debate about, and adoption of solutions to the general problems concerning the future of society – whether these be economic or educational, whether they deal with the rest of the world or with domestic relations between various social strata or classes. All these decisions concern the *whole* of the population and they will be theirs to make.

It is probable, even certain, that there will be different views about such problems. Each approach will seek to be as coherent and systematic as possible. People will subscribe to particular viewpoints, though they will be dispersed geographically or occupationally. These people will come together to defend their views – in other words, they will form political groups. On

the national level, the councils will have to decide whether they consider the general orientation of this or that party compatible with the makeup of the new society, and therefore whether such parties will be allowed to function on a legal basis.

There would be no point in pretending that there would not be a contradiction between the existence of such groups and the role of the councils. The two could not develop simultaneously. If the councils fulfil their function, they will provide the principal and vital setting not only for political *confrontations* but also for the *formation* of political opinions. Political groups, on the other hand, are exclusive environments for the schooling of their members, as well as being exclusive poles for their loyalty. The parallel existence of both councils and political groups will imply that a part of real political life will be taking place outside the councils. People will then tend to act in the councils according to decisions already made elsewhere. Should this tendency predominate, it would bring about the rapid atrophy and finally the disappearance of the councils. Conversely, real socialist development would be characterized by the progressive atrophy of established political groups.

This contradiction could not be abolished by a stroke of the pen or by any 'statutory' decree. The persistence of political groups would reflect the continuation of characteristics inherited from capitalist society, in particular the persistence of divergent interests (and their corresponding ideologies) even after these capitalistic traits have disappeared. People will not form parties for or against quantum theory, or over simple differences of opinion about some particular point. The flowering or final atrophy of political groups will depend on the ability of workers' power to unite society.

The basis of parties is not a difference of opinion as such but, rather, differences on fundamentals and the more or less systematic unity of each 'set of views'. In other words, parties express a set orientation corresponding to a more or less clear ideology, in its turn flowing from the existence of social positions leading to conflicting aspirations. As long as such positions exist and lead to a political 'projection' of expectations, one cannot abolish political groups – but as they begin to disappear it is unlikely that groups will be formed about 'divergences' of opinion in general.

If political organizations expressing the survival of different interests and ideologies persist, a working-class socialist party, a partisan defender of proletarian socialist organization will exist also. It will be open to all those who favour total power for the councils and will differ from all others, both in its programme *and in its practice*, precisely on this point: its fundamental activity will be directed toward the concentration of power in the councils and to their becoming the *only* centres of political life. This implies that it will struggle against power being held by any particular party, whichever one it may be.

It is obvious that the democratic power structure of a socialist society excludes the possibility of a Party 'holding power'. The very words would be meaningless within the framework we have described. In so far as major trends of opinion might arise or diverge on important issues, the holders of majority viewpoints might be elected as delegates to the councils, assemblies, communes, etc., more often than others. (This does not necessarily follow, however, for delegates will be elected mainly on the basis of overall confidence, and not always according to their opinion on this or that issue.) Parties will not be organizations seeking power, and the central assembly of councils will not be a 'workers' parliament'; people will not be elected to it as members of a party. The same goes for any government chosen by this assembly.²⁵

The role of a working-class socialist party will be quite important initially. It will have to defend these conceptions systematically and coherently. It will have to conduct an extensive struggle to unmask and denounce bureaucratic tendencies, not in general, but where they concretely show themselves; also, and perhaps above all, initially it will be the only group capable of showing the ways and means whereby technique and technicians could be organized and directed so as to allow working-class democracy both to stabilize itself and to blossom forth. The work of the party could, for instance, hasten considerably the setting-up of the democratic planning mechanisms we analysed earlier. The party is in fact the *only* form in which a coalescence of workers and intellectuals can now take place in our society of exploitation. And this fusion could also allow the working-class power to make rapid use of techniques that would advance its goals. But if, some years after the revolution, the party continued to grow, it would be the surest sign that it was dead – as a working-class socialist party. [. . .]

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

- federate into a central assembly and declare themselves the only power in the land;
- proceed to arm the proletariat and order the dissolution of the police and of the standing army;

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

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

Notes

- 1 This following part will be published in the next issue of *S. ou B.* [T/E: see *CS III*].
- 2 The expression is to be found in part 3 of Engels's *Anti-Dühring*. [T/E: The French phrase is 'en connaissance de cause'. Castoriadis refers to a passage in section 2 of this third part, pp. 309–10, of the edition we are using (trans. Emile Burns, ed. C. P. Dutt [New York: International Publishers, 1939]). This edition translates the phrase in question merely as 'with complete understanding'.]
- 3 A few years ago a certain 'philosopher' could seriously ask how one could even discuss Stalin's decisions, since one did not know the real facts upon which he alone could base them. (J.-P. Sartre, 'Les Communistes et la paix', in *Les Temps Modernes*, 81, 84–5, and 101 [July and October–November 1952, April 1954]; trans. Martha H. Fletcher, *The Communists and the Peace* [New York: George Braziller, 1968].)
- 4 Lenin took the opportunity, in *State and Revolution*, to defend the idea of direct democracy against the reformists of his day who contemptuously called it 'primitive democracy'.
- 5 On this feature of working life, see Paul Romano, 'L'Ouvrier américain', in *S. ou B.*, 5–6 (March 1950), pp. 129–32 [T/E: 'Life in the Factory', in *The American Worker* (1947; reprinted, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1972), pp. 37–39], and R. Berthier, 'Une Expérience d'organisation ouvrière', in *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956), pp. 29–31.
- 6 Daniel Mothé's text, 'L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière', also in this issue [*S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957), pp. 75ff] already is one *de facto* response – coming from the factory itself – to the concrete problem of shop-floor workers' management and that of how to organize work. In referring to this text, we are considering here only the problems of the factory *as a whole*.
- 7 In J. A. C. Brown's *The Social Psychology of Industry* (London: Penguin, 1954), there is a

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE LIBRARY

- striking contrast between the devastating analysis the author makes of present capitalist production and the only 'conclusions' he can draw, which are pious exhortations to management that it should 'do better', 'democratize itself', etc. Let it not be said, however, that an 'industrial sociologist' takes no position, that he merely describes facts and does not suggest norms. Advising the managerial apparatus to 'do better' is itself a taking of a position, one that has been shown here to be completely utopian.
- 8 See the Twentieth Congress texts analysed by Claude Lefort in 'Le Totalitarisme sans Staline', *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956), in particular pp. 59–62 [now in *Éléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie*, 2nd edn (Paris: Gallimard), pp. 219–23; T/E: these sections were omitted from the translation, 'Totalitarianism Without Stalin', *The Political Forms of Modern Society, Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, John B. Thompson, ed. (Oxford, England: Polity, 1986)].
 - 9 See Mothé, 'L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière'.
 - 10 On the extreme overstaffing of 'nonproductive' departments in today's factories, see G. Vivier, 'La Vie en usine', *S. ou B.*, 12 (August 1953), pp. 39–41. Vivier estimates that in the business he describes, 'without a rational reorganization of these departments, 30% of the employees are already redundant' (emphasis in the original).
 - 11 See Mothé, 'L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière'.
 - 12 Ibid.
 - 13 Bureaucratic 'planning' as carried out in Russia and the Eastern European countries proves nothing, one way or the other. It is just as irrational and just as anarchic and wasteful as the capitalist 'market' – though in different ways. The waste is both 'external' (the wrong decisions being made) and 'internal' (brought about by the resistance of the workers) to the production process. For further details, see *PRAB* (1956).
 - 14 The field is in constant expansion. The starting points remain, however, Leontief's *The Structure of American Economy, 1919–1939: An Empirical Application of Equilibrium Analysis* (1951; reprinted, Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1976), and the essays by Leontief et al., *Studies in the Structure of the American Economy: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in Input–Output Analysis* (1953; reprinted, Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1976).
 - 15 Tjalling Koopmans, *Activity Analysis of Production and Allocation* (1951; reprinted, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972).
 - 16 The 1955 Nantes strikes took place around an antihierarchical demand for a uniform increase for everyone. The Hungarian workers' councils demanded the abolition of norms and severe limitations on hierarchy. What inadvertently is said in official Russian proclamations indicates that a permanent struggle against hierarchy is taking place in the factories of that country. See *PRAB*.
 - 17 For a detailed discussion of the problem of hierarchy, see *RPR*, section 5, and *DC I*, in *S. ou B.*, 13 (January 1954), pp. 67–9.
 - 18 On the structure of a large insurance company undergoing rapid 'industrialization', both technically as well as socially and politically, see the articles by Henri Collet ('La Grève aux A.G.-Vie', in *S. ou B.*, 7 [August 1951], pp. 103–10) and R. Berthier ('Une Expérience d'organisation ouvrière: Le Conseil du personnel des A.G.-Vie', in *S. ou B.*, 20 [December 1957], pp. 1–64). On the same process taking place within the United States, where 'tertiary' sectors are being merged, see C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), esp. pp. 192–8. In order to take stock of the significance of the changes that are expected to occur in these areas, we must remember that the industrialization of office and 'service' work (and, ultimately, the industrialization of 'intellectual' work) is still in its infancy. Cf. N. Wiener, *Cybernetics* (New York: Wiley, 1948), pp. 37–8. In an entirely different sector, that of theatre and film, it is interesting to compare the ideas expounded in this article with the multiple (economic, political, work management) role the Revolutionary Workers' Committee of this sector played during the Hungarian

- Revolution. See 'Les Artistes du théâtre et du cinéma pendant la révolution hongroise', in *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1957), pp. 96–104.
- 19 See section 2 of chapter 1 of *State and Revolution*.
 - 20 See chapter 4 ('Technique and the State') of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, trans. J. Wilkinson, intro. Robert K. Merton (New York: Knopf, 1964). In spite of his fundamentally incorrect outlook, Ellul has the merit of analysing some of these key aspects of the reality of the modern State, aspects that are blithely ignored by most sociologists and political writers – whether 'Marxist' or not.
 - 21 This is Ellul's point of view, as expressed in *The Technological Society*. Ellul concludes that 'it is futile to try to put a halt to this process or to grasp hold of it and guide it'. For him, technique is only the self-developing process of enslavement taking place independently of any social context. [T/E: I have translated Castoriadis's quotation of Ellul.]
 - 22 See C. Wright Mills (*White Collar*, pp. 347–8, and *The Power Elite* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1956], pp. 134ff, 145ff, etc.) for an illustration of the total lack of any relationship between 'technical' capacities of any kind, on the one hand, and current industrial management or political leadership groups, on the other.
 - 23 'Plato defined the limits of the size of the city as the number of people who could hear the voice of a single orator: today those limits do not define a city but a civilization. Wherever neotechnic instruments exist and a common language is used there are now the elements of almost as close a political unity as that which once was possible in the tiniest cities of Attica. The possibilities for good and evil here are immense' (Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934], p. 241).
 - 24 *1905*, trans. Anya Bostock (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 109.
 - 25 The events in Poland have furnished yet another confirmation of the idea that the Party cannot be a governmental organ (see *PRAB*, in *PSW* 2, pp. 84–5, and *VPB* [1957; now in *SB* 2, pp. 327–9 and 348–52; reprinted in *SB**, pp. 403–4 and 441–13]).