

European Socialism and Communism
Communist Interventions, Volume I

Communist Research Cluster

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Reasoning about history is inseparably reasoning about power

Guy Debord

Preface

We present here a history of twentieth-century communism through primary sources, divided into fourteen chapters arranged in chronological order. Each chapter deals with a historical moment or theoretical debate, and contains an amount of reading appropriate for one week's time. We hope that this reader will provide the foundation for seminars and reading groups.

Tarrying with the history of twentieth-century communism is difficult: these texts issue a clarification call for human emancipation. At times, their authors seem almost hubristic. They confidently proclaim that the future belongs to communism. Yet, if these pages begin with a confident outlook, they end in despair. The twentieth century looks, to us, much as Walter Benjamin suggested the past did to the Angel of History: "Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet." Why should we feel compelled to revisit this history, today?

In compiling these texts, we hope to transmit a series of revolutionary perspectives. However – and this point bears repeating – we do not think that one can find answers to the burning questions of the present moment in the revolutionary theories of the past. It would be foolish to search these pages for the "right" perspective to adopt.

Nevertheless, a historical awareness may prove useful, for at least two reasons. It has the potential to free us from overly simple perspectives on our own times. In part, that is because history gives a sense of the complexity of revolutions: they tend to leap out in unexpected directions. Revolutions take place on a grand scale, involving not just handfuls of revolutionaries, but millions of people acting in concert and conflict. Historical awareness also shows us the ways in which the views we already hold are, in certain respects, derivatives of historical positions. Engaging with the revolutionary traditions of the past helps us understand the positions we hold, in terms of their origins and limitations. Now is the time to free ourselves from the burdens of old ideas – while remaining intransigent about the communist potential of the present moment.

Access to the history of revolutionary theory has typically been restricted to small cliques passing down their traditions, with their own associated reading lists, to acolytes. That is one of the main reasons we have put together the present reader: we hope it will enable people to undertake their own revolutionary education, on their own terms. At a time when many people are questioning capitalism, we believe the history of ideas about what it would take to overthrow capitalism deserves to be propagated more widely.

In defense of the particular selections we have made, we offer the following brief points:

- 1) We do not suggest that this reader – which begins with some of the founding texts of the Second International and continues to the end of the twentieth-century labor movement – covers the entire canon of revolutionary theory. We hope to produce other readers in the future. Two will focus on race and on gender. Another reader may deal with anarchism and another with the

nineteenth century. Yet another may look at the United States.

2) Within the history of socialist and communist theory, we have focused on texts that deal specifically with revolution. Much was left out: texts on nationalism and imperialism, as well as texts about crisis, culture, and so on. In part, that was because we wanted to avoid the topics that make regular appearances on academic syllabuses (for that reason, the Frankfurt School was cut), as well as topics that are overly technical. But also, we hope that this reader can serve as a reminder that most of the debates in the history of communism were actually about how to overthrow capitalism.

3) Many self-described revolutionary organizations are dedicated to promoting their worldview at the expense of others. A reader that refuses to consider perspectives that do not align with the prejudices of the editors will be poorer for it. We try to present a history that is non-sectarian. However, we must admit that this reader contains many texts from small, or short-lived, heterodox traditions. We believe that it was on the margins of communist history that many of the most interesting positions emerged.

Although the readings herein are rewarding to peruse in their own right, they are more evocative when paired with a companion historical text which provides greater insight into the context in which these texts were penned. For this purpose, we recommend *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* by Geoff Eley (Oxford University Press, 2002). PDFs of this text can be found online, for those who know where to look. For each week, along with the required readings we note the corresponding Eley chapters or other alternative readings that serve the same purpose. Further readings for each week's topic matter can be found at the end of the reader.

Each week's reading is preceded by an introduction. We have tried to keep these concise and informative, in order to let the texts speak for themselves.

Please note that we have abridged these texts in order to keep them short and focused. We have tried to indicate the locations of these abridgments with ellipses, but be forewarned abridgments may not always be clearly marked. We also sometimes omit the footnotes that accompany the original or a later edition of the text. In addition, in some cases, we have made minor typographical changes and corrected errors from prior digitizations.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Marxists Internet Archive (marxists.org) and also libcom.org, two resources without which preparing this reader would have been impossible; most of the texts herein were taken from one of these two sources. We encourage anyone interested in further investigating these ideas to browse their libraries.

We hope that this reader plays a small part in contributing to what Anton Pannekoek called the "deep revolution of ideas."

Communist Research Cluster

Oakland, CA

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communist.research.cluster@gmail.com

<http://communistresearchcluster.wordpress.com>

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Week 1

Orthodoxy

Orthodox Marxism refers to a political and philosophical trend that emerged after the death of Karl Marx which attempted to develop and refine Marx's theories. Orthodox Marxism served as the intellectual underpinning for the plethora of socialist political parties that were founded at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century.

The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) was by far the largest and most influential socialist party by 1900. Karl Kautsky was one of its leading figures who, together with August Bebel and Eduard Bernstein, authored 1891's *Erfurt Program*, the SPD's official platform. This program was the successor to the 1875 *Gotha Program*, the SPD's initial platform which Marx famously criticized in his *Critique of the Gotha Program*.

Kautsky published his commentary on the *Erfurt Program* in *The Class Struggle*, which became a highly influential tract of orthodox Marxism. Selections from Chapters 5 and 4 of *The Class Struggle* are the reading for this week (*Note*: Chapter 5 precedes Chapter 4 below), as well as the text of the *Erfurt Program*.

The Eley reading for this week is Chapter 3.

1.1 Karl Kautsky, The Class Struggle (1892)

V. The Class Struggle

1. Socialism and the Property-Holding Classes

The last paragraphs of our declaration of principles reads as follows:

This social transformation means the liberation, not only of the proletariat, but of the whole human race. Only the working-class, however, can bring it about. All other classes, despite their conflicting interests, maintain their existence on the basis of the private ownership of the means of production, and therefore have a common motive for supporting the principles of the existing social order.

The struggle of the working-class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. The working-class cannot develop its economic organization and wage its economic battles without political rights. It cannot accomplish the transfer of the means

of production to the community as a whole without first having come into possession of political power.

To make this struggle of the workers conscious and unified, to keep its one great object in view, this is the purpose of the Socialist Party.

In all lands where capitalist production prevails the interests of the working-class are identical. With the development of world-commerce and production for the world-market the position of the workers in each country becomes increasingly dependent on that of the workers in other countries. The liberation of the working-class is, therefore, a task in which the workers of all civilized lands are equally concerned. Being conscious of this fact the Socialist Party proclaims its solidarity with the class-conscious workers of all lands.

The Socialist Party, accordingly, struggles, not for any class privileges, but for the abolition of classes and class-rule, for equal rights and equal duties for all, without distinction of sex or race. In conformity with these principles it opposes in present day society, not only the exploitation and oppression of wage-workers, but also every form of exploitation and oppression, be it directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race.

The introductory sentence of the first of these paragraphs needs little explanation. We have already shown that the triumph of socialism is in the interest of our entire social development. In a certain sense it is even in the interest of the owning and exploiting classes. These, like their victims, suffer from the contradictions of the modern method of production. Some of them; degenerate in idleness, others wear themselves out in the ceaseless race for profits; while over them all hangs the Damocles' sword of bankruptcy.

But observation teaches us that the great majority of the owners and exploiters are bitterly opposed to socialism. Can this be due simply to lack of knowledge and insight? The spokesmen among the adversaries of socialism are, on the contrary, the very persons whose positions in the government, in society, and in science should fit them best of all to understand the social mechanism and to perceive the law of social evolution.

And so shocking are the conditions in modern society that no one who wishes to be taken seriously in politics or science dares any longer to deny the truth of the charges preferred by socialism against the present social order. On the contrary the dearest thinkers in all the capitalist political parties admit that there is "some truth" in those charges; some even declare that the final triumph of socialism is inevitable unless society suddenly turns about and reforms – a thing these gentlemen imagine can be done offhand, provided the demands of this or that party be promptly granted. In this manner even those among the non-socialist parties who best understand the socialist critique of capitalist society save themselves from accepting the conclusions of this critique.

The cause of this remarkable phenomenon is not difficult to discover. Although certain important interests of the property-holding classes plead against the private ownership of the means of production, other interests, more immediate and easily discernible, demand its retention.

This is especially the case with the rich. They can expect no immediate gain from the abolition of private property in the means of production. The beneficent results that would flow therefrom would be ultimately felt by them as well as by society in general, but such results are comparatively distant. The disadvantages which they would suffer are, on the other hand, self-evident; the power and distinction they enjoy today, would disappear at once, and not a few might be deprived, also, of their present ease and comfort.

It is otherwise with the lower ranks of the property-holding classes, the small producers, merchants and farmers. These have nothing to lose in point of power and distinction, and they can only gain in point of ease and comfort by the introduction of the socialist system of production. But in order to realize this they must rise above the point of view of their own class. From the standpoint of these small capitalists or farmers the capitalist system of production is unintelligible; modern socialism, naturally, they can understand still less. The one thing they have a clear notion of is the necessity of private ownership in their own implements of labor if their system of production is to be preserved. So long as the small manufacturer reasons as a small manufacturer, the small farmer as a small farmer, the small merchant as a small merchant, so long as they are still possessed of a strong sense of their own class, so long will they be bound to the idea of private ownership in the means of production, so long will they instinctively resist socialism, however ill they may fare under capitalism.

We have seen in a previous chapter how private property in the means of production fetters the small producers to their undeveloped occupations long after these have ceased to afford them a competence, and even when they might improve their condition by becoming wage-workers outright. Thus private ownership in the means of production is the force that binds all the property-holding classes to the capitalist system, even those who are themselves among the exploited, whose property-holding has become a bitter mockery.

Only those individuals among the small capitalists and farmers who have despaired of the preservation of their class, who are no longer blind to the fact that the form of production upon which they depend for a living is doomed, are in a position to understand the principles of socialism. But lack of information and narrowness of view, both of which are natural results of their condition, make it difficult for them to realize the utter hopelessness of their class. Their misery and their hysterical search for a means of salvation have hitherto only had the effect of making them the easy prey of any demagog who was sufficiently self-assertive and who did not stick at promises.

Among the upper ranks of the property-holding classes there exists a higher degree of culture and a broader view. Here and there a few individuals are still affected by idealistic reminiscences from the days of the early revolutionary struggles. But woe to the person in these upper ranks who shows an interest in socialism or engages in its propaganda. He must soon choose between giving up his ideas or breaking all the social bonds that have held and supported him. Few possess the vigor and independence of character requisite to approach the point where the roads fork; few among these few are brave enough to break with their own class when they have reached the point; and, finally, of these few among the few the greater portion have hitherto soon grown tired, recognized the "indiscretions of their youth," and finally turned "sensible."

The idealists among the upper classes are the only ones whose support it is at all possible to enlist in favor of socialism. But even among these the majority are moved by the insight which they have acquired only far enough to wear themselves out in fruitless searchings for a peaceful solution of the social problem; that is to say, in searching for a solution that will reconcile the interests of the capitalist class with their more or less developed knowledge of socialism and their consciences.

Only those bourgeois idealists develop into genuine socialists who have, not only the requisite theoretical insight, but also the courage and strength to break with their class.

Accordingly, the cause of socialism has little to hope from the property-holding classes. Individual members may be won over to socialism, but only such as no longer belong by convictions and conduct to the class to which their economic position assigns them. These will ever be a very small minority, except when, during revolutionary periods, the scales incline to the side of socialism. Only at such times may the socialists look forward to a stampede from the ranks of the property-holding

classes.

Thus far the only favorable recruiting ground for the socialist army has been, not the classes which still have something to lose, however little that may be, but the class of those who have nothing to lose but their chains, and a world to gain.

2. Servants and Menials

The recruiting ground of socialism is the class of the propertyless, but not all ranks of this class are equally favorable.

Though it is false to say, with the Philistines, that there have always been poor people, it is nevertheless true that pauperism is as old as the system of production for sale. At first it appeared only as an exceptional phenomenon. In the Middle Ages, for example, there were but few who did not own the instruments of production necessary for the satisfaction of their own wants. In those days it was an easy matter for the comparatively small number of propertyless persons to find situations with the property-holding families as assistants, farm-hands, journeymen, maids, etc. These were generally young persons, and their lot was alleviated by the prospect of establishing their own workshops and owning their own homes. In all cases they worked with the head of the family or his wife, and enjoyed in common with them the fruits of their labor. As members of a property-holding family they were not proletarians; they felt an interest in the property of the family whose prosperity and adversity they shared alike. Where servants are part of the family of the property-holder, they will be found ready to defend property even though they have none themselves. Among such socialism cannot strike root.

The position of the apprentices was much the same as that of the classes just discussed (Compare Ch.II., 1).

Gradually, however, there grew up beside these classes, which really took part in production, another class, that of personal servants. Some of the poor turned for support to the families of the greater exploiters. In the Middle Ages this meant entering the personal service of the nobles, rich merchants, or higher clergy. The poor entered this service, not to assist in productive labor, but to act as mercenary soldiers or mere lackeys. The ancient feeling of mutual interest has disappeared, but a new one has taken its place. There are various grades of servants, with different work and different pay. Each individual is eager to improve his position by any means within his power. His success is dependent on the master's favor. The more skillfully he adapts himself, the better are his prospects. Again, the larger the income of the master and the greater his power and distinction, the more plentiful are the crumbs which fall to his menials; this holds especially of those menials who are kept for show, whose only task is to make a parade of the superfluities which their master enjoys, to assist him in squandering his wealth, and to stand by him loyally if he commits crime or folly. The modern servant, accordingly, comes into relations of peculiar intimacy with his master, and thus he has naturally developed into a foe of the oppressed and exploited working-class; not infrequently he is more ruthless than his master in his treatment of them. The master, if he has any discretion at all, will not kill the hen that lays the golden egg; he will preserve her, not only for himself, but also for his successors. The menial is not restrained by any such considerations.

Small wonder that among the people generally nothing is more hated than this class of menials. Their subservience toward those above and their brutality toward those below have become proverbial.

The characteristics of the menial are, however, not confined to the propertyless people of the lower classes. The poverty-stricken noble seeking a livelihood as courtier is on a level with the

servant of the lowest class.

But we are here dealing with menials of this latter class. The growing intensity of exploitation, the constantly swelling surplus enjoyed by the capitalist, together with his resulting extravagance, all favor a steady increase in the number of those employed as servants. That is to say, they favor the growth of a class which, despite its lack of property, is not at all a promising recruiting ground for the socialist movement.

But other tendencies, fortunately, are working in the opposite direction. The steady revolution in industry, with its encroachments upon the family, its withdrawal of one occupation after another from the sphere of household duties and the assignment of them to special industries, and, above all, the infinite division and subdivision of labor, are building up the various trades of barbers, waiters, cab drivers, etc. Long after these and similar trades have lost their domestic character they tend to preserve the characteristics of their origin; nevertheless, as time passes, these characteristics wear off and the members of these trades acquire the qualities of the industrial wage-working class.

3. The Slums

However numerous the class of menials may be, it has not, as a rule, been able to absorb the whole number of those left propertyless. The unemployable, children, old people, sick and cripples have been from the beginning unable to earn a living by entering into service. To these were added at the beginning of modern times a large number who could work but found nothing to do. For them there was nothing but to beg, steal, or prostitute themselves. They were compelled either to perish or to throw overboard all sense of shame, honor and self-respect. They prolong their existence only by giving precedence to their immediate wants over their regard for their reputations. That such a condition cannot but exercise the most demoralizing and corrupting influence is self-evident.

Furthermore, the effect of this influence is intensified by the fact that the unemployed poor are utterly superfluous to the existing order; their extinction would relieve it of an undesirable burden. A class that has become superfluous, that has no necessary function to fulfil, must degenerate.

And beggars cannot even raise themselves in their own estimation by indulging in the self-deception that they are necessary to the social system; they have no recollection of a time when their class performed any useful services; they have no way of forcing society to support them as parasites. They are only tolerated. Humility is, consequently, the first duty of the beggar and the highest virtue of the poor. Like the menials, this class of the proletariat is servile toward the powerful; it furnishes no opposition to the existing social order. On the contrary, it ekes out its existence from the crumbs that fall from the tables of the rich. Why should it wish to abolish its benefactors? Furthermore, beggars are not themselves exploited; the higher the degree of exploitation, the larger the incomes of the rich, all the more have the beggars to expect. Like the menial class, they are partakers in the fruits of exploitation; they have no motive for wishing to put an end to the system.

But though this section of the proletariat has never offered any resistance to the system of exploitation, still it cannot be regarded as a bulwark of this system. Cowardly and unprincipled, it soon deserts its benefactors when power and wealth have slipped from their hands. This class has never taken the lead in any revolutionary movement. But it has always been on hand during social disturbances, ready to fish in troubled waters. Occasionally it has given the last kick to a falling class; as a rule, however, it has satisfied itself with exploiting every revolution that has broken out, only to betray it at the earliest opportunity.

The capitalist system of production has greatly increased the slum proletariat. It constantly sends to it new recruits. In the large centers of industry this element constitutes a considerable

portion of the population.

In character and view of life the slum proletariat approaches the lowest ranks of the farmer and small bourgeois class. Like these, it has despaired of its own power and seeks to save itself through aid received from above.

4. The Beginnings of the Wage-Earning Proletariat

It was from the last mentioned classes that capitalism drew its first supply of wage-labor. It needed not so much skilled workers as docile ones. And since the slum-proletariat and the sections of the population most closely related to it had already learned obedience and humility they were well fitted to supply the demand. With workers from this source capitalism could develop without opposition. They were easily exploited to the limit. They would work long hours amidst almost intolerable conditions. Whoever wishes to learn of the deplorable state of the proletariat during the early days of modern industry has but to read Frederick Engels' classic work on the working-class of England.

5. The Advance of the Wage-Earning Proletariat

At the time of the beginning of modern industry the term proletariat implied absolute degeneracy. And there are persons who believe this is still the case. But even in the earliest days there was the beginning of a great gulf between the working-class proletariat and the slum proletariat.

The slum proletariat has always been the same, whether in modern London or ancient Rome. The modern laboring proletariat is an absolutely unique phenomenon.

Between these two there is, first of all, the difference that lies in the fact that the first is a parasite and the second the most important root of modern social life. Far from receiving alms, the modern working proletarians support the whole structure of our society. At first, to be sure, they do not perceive this, but sooner or later they discover that instead of receiving their bread from the capitalist they furnish him his.

From house-servants and apprentices, on the other hand, the working proletarians distinguish themselves by the fact that they do not live and work with their exploiters. The personal relations that formerly bound them to their employers have disappeared.

On the other hand, the modern working-man does not envy and imitate the rich, as did the poor of pre-capitalist days. He hates them as enemies and despises them as idlers.

At first this feeling exhibits itself sporadically. But as soon as the workers discover that their interests are common, that they are all opposed to the exploiter, it takes the form of great organizations and open battles against the exploiting class. The sense of power that goes with class-consciousness means the regeneration of the working-class. It raises this class forever above the level of the parasitic poor.

All the conditions of modern production tend to increase the solidarity of the laboring classes. In the Middle Ages each artisan produced a finished product; he was industrially almost independent. Today it often takes scores, or even hundreds, to produce a finished product. Thus does industry teach co-operation.

Perhaps modern uniformity of conditions is even more effective in this direction than the necessity for co-operation. In the Medieval guilds there were the beginning of internationalism, but the various trades were sharply divided. Among the menial, as we have seen, divisions in rank were endless. But in the modern factory there are practically no gradations. All the employees work under nearly the same conditions, and the individual laborer is powerless to change them. Under

the influence of machinery, moreover, the distinctions among the trades are rapidly disappearing. This is indicated by the fact that apprenticeships are constantly being shortened. Whole trades are often rendered unnecessary by some new invention, and those employed in them are forced to turn to another form of labor. This tends more and more to make an individual worker forget his craft and fight for his entire class.

Uprisings against employers are nothing new. They occurred in plenty during the Middle Ages. But only during the nineteenth century did these uprisings attain the character of a class-struggle. And thus this great conflict has taken on a higher purpose than the righting of temporary wrongs; the labor movement has become a revolutionary movement.

6. The Conflict Between the Elevating and Degrading Tendencies Which Affect the Proletariat.

The elevation of the working-class is a necessary and inevitable process. But it is neither peaceful nor regular. The tendency of the capitalist system is, as we have shown in Chapter II, to degrade the proletariat ever more and more. The moral regeneration of the working-class is possible only in opposition to this tendency and its representatives, the capitalists. It cannot come about except through the new tendency developed in the working-class by the modern conditions of labor. But the two tendencies, the one upward and the other downward, vary constantly in different places and at different periods. They depend on the condition of the market, the organization of industry, the development of machinery, the insight of the capitalists and workers, etc., etc. All of these conditions vary from year to year in all the numerous branches of industry.

But fortunately for human development there comes a time in the history of every section of the proletariat when the elevating tendencies gain the upper hand. And when they have once wakened full class-consciousness in any group of workers, the consciousness of solidarity with all the members of the working-class, the consciousness of the strength that is born of union; as soon as any group has recognized that it is essential to society and that it dare hope for better things in the future, then it is well nigh impossible to shove that group back into the degenerate mass of beings whose opposition to the system under which they suffer takes no other form than that of unreasoned hate.

7. Philanthropy and Labor Legislation

If every section of the proletariat had been dependent on its own efforts, the uplifting process would have begun much later and been much slower and more painful than it actually was. Without help many a division of the proletariat now occupying an honorable position would not have been at all able to overcome the difficulties that are inherent in all beginnings. Aid came from many an upper social rank, from the upper ranks of the proletariat as well as from the property-holding classes. The assistance rendered by the latter of these was of no slight value in the early days of capitalist large production.

During the Middle Ages poverty was so slight that public and private benevolence sufficed to deal with it. It presented no problem for society to solve; in so far as it gave occasion for reflection it was only the subject of pious contemplation; it was looked upon as a visitation from heaven, intended either to punish the wicked or try the godly. To the rich it furnished an opportunity to exercise their virtue.

With the growth of the capitalist system, however, the number of the unemployed increased, and poverty assumed tremendous proportions. The spectacle of a large pauper class, which was as novel as it was dangerous, drew upon it the attention of all thoughtful and kindly disposed persons.

Primitive means for the distribution of charity proved inadequate. To care for all the poor was soon felt to be a work that greatly exceeded the powers of the community. Then there arose a new problem: how to abolish poverty? A great many solutions were offered. These ranged from schemes to get rid of the poor by hanging or deportation to elaborate plans for communistic colonies. The latter met with great applause among people of culture, but the former were the only suggestions ever really tried.

By degrees, however, the question of poverty took on a new aspect. The capitalistic system of production developed rapidly and finally became the controlling one. As this development went on, the problem of poverty ceased to exist for the thinkers in the capitalist class. Capitalist production rests upon the proletariat; to put an end to the latter were to render the former impossible. Colossal poverty is the foundation of colossal wealth; he who would eliminate the poverty of the masses assails the wealth of the few. Accordingly, whoever attempts to remedy the poverty of the workers is pronounced "an enemy of law and order."

True enough, neither fear nor compassion has ceased, even under this changed aspect of things, to be felt in capitalist circles, and to tell in favor of the proletariat. For poverty is a source of danger to the whole social fabric; it breeds pestilence and crime. Accordingly a few of the more clear-headed and humane among the ruling classes are willing to do something for the working-class; but to the bulk of them, who neither dare, nor can afford, to break with their own class, the problem can no longer be that of the abolition of the proletariat. At best they cannot go beyond the elevation of the proletarian. The proletariat is by all means to continue, able to work and satisfied with its condition.

Within these bounds, of course, philanthropy can manifest itself in manifold ways. Most of its methods are either wholly useless or calculated only to give temporary aid in isolated cases.

There is, however, one notable exception to this generalization. I refer to labor legislation. When, during the first decades of the nineteenth century, capitalist production on a large scale made its entry into England and was there accompanied by all the horrors which it can produce under the worst conditions, the wisest among the philanthropists arrived at the conviction that there was but one thing able to check the degeneration of the workers in the industries affected. They immediately began to propose laws for the protection of the workers, at least for the protection of the most helpless among them, the women and children.

The capitalists engaged in large production in England did not at that time constitute the ruling section of the capitalist class, as they do today. Many economic, as well as political, interests among the other sections – especially the small producers and landlords – spoke in favor of limiting the powers of the large capitalists over their workmen. The movement in this direction was favored also by the consideration that unless the large capitalists were restrained, the working class, which was the foundation of English industry, would inevitably perish. This was a consideration which could not fail to influence every member of the ruling class intelligent enough to see further than his own immediate interests. Added to this there was the support of a few large capitalists who realized that they had sufficient means to adapt themselves to the proposed laws and who saw that their less wealthy competitors would be ruined by them. In spite of all this, and notwithstanding the fact that the working-class itself set in motion a powerful movement in favor of factory laws, it took a hard fight to obtain the first slight factory legislation and subsequently to extend it.

Slight though these first conquests seemed, they were, nevertheless, sufficient to awaken out of their lethargy those ranks of the proletariat in whose behalf they were passed and to arouse in them the upward tendencies inherent in their social position. Indeed, even before the movement had achieved any victory, the struggle was enough to reveal to the proletarians how important they

were and what a power they wielded. These early struggles shook them up, imparted to them self-consciousness and self-respect, put an end to their despair, and set up before them a goal beyond their immediate future.

Another, and extremely important, means of improving the condition of the working-class is the public schools. Their influence cannot be overestimated. Nevertheless their effect in the direction of elevating the proletariat is inferior to that of thorough-going factory laws.

The more fully the capitalist system develops, the more large production crowds out inferior forms or changes their character, the more imperative does the strengthening of factory laws become. It becomes necessary to extend them, not only to all branches of large industry, but to home industry and agriculture, as well. In the same measure as the importance of these laws increases there grows also the influence of large capitalists in modern society. Property-owners who are not industrial capitalists – landlords, small manufacturers, shop-keepers, etc. – become infected with capitalist modes of thought. The thinkers and statesmen of the bourgeoisie, formerly its far-sighted leaders, sink to the role of mere defenders of the capitalist class.

The devastation of the working-class by capitalist production is so shocking that only the most shameless and greedy capitalists dare to refuse a certain amount of statutory protection to labor. But for any important labor measure, the eight-hour law, for example, there will be found few supporters among the property-holding class. Capitalist philanthropy becomes constantly more timid; it tends more and more to leave to the workers themselves the struggle for their protection. The modern struggle for the eight-hour day bears a very different aspect from the one which was carried on in England fifty years ago for the ten-hour day. The property-holding politicians who are advocating the modern measure are moved, not by philanthropy; but by the necessity of yielding to their working-class constituents. The struggle for labor legislation is becoming more and more a class-struggle between proletarians and capitalists. On the continent of Europe and in the United States, where the struggle for labor laws commenced much later than in England, it bore this character from the start. The proletariat has nothing more to hope for from the property-holding classes in its endeavor to raise itself. It now depends wholly upon its own efforts.

8. The Labor Union Movement

Struggles between laborers and exploiters are nothing new. Extremely bitter and protracted ones occurred toward the end of the Middle Ages between apprentices and masters. As early as the fifteenth century, masters here and there would seek to escape from work by increasing the number of their apprentices. On the other hand they made it more and more difficult for any but their sons to become masters. Gradually the family relation between master and man was loosened, and the modern division into classes had begun.

As soon as the master began to play the part of modern capitalist, conflicts were inevitable. And in one respect the apprentices were in a good position to assert themselves. In each city they were well-organized. Each guild included all the apprentices in a particular trade; it controlled absolutely the supply of labor so far as that trade was concerned. When the time of conflict arrived, it could use with tremendous effectiveness the weapons which have become so familiar in modern times, the strike and the boycott.

All the increasing power of the modern state was called into action to teach the unruly apprentices their place. The suppression of the working-class has been from the beginning the chief function of the state, and in these early days it performed this function with terrible effect. But all its efforts did not succeed in putting an end to the trouble. Denied the right of organization, the

apprentices formed secret unions and maintained them in the face of frightful persecutions.

But what the state could not accomplish was accomplished by industrial evolution. After the close of the Middle Ages, particularly during the eighteenth century, manufacturing was becoming an increasingly important feature of the industrial world. Before the introduction of machinery, employees in factories had the advantages neither of the Medieval system of industry nor of the modern. They lived in large towns and were often of various races. More than this, different degrees of skill were demanded for different occupations. For all of these reasons they found it difficult to organize. Their only advantage lay in the fact that their work did require skill. They were not compelled to compete against the entire mass of the unemployed.

Only the introduction of machinery altered this last condition. It made the whole mass of the unemployed serviceable to capitalism and threw even proletarian women and children upon the labor market.

Since the introduction of machinery the transformation of industry has proceeded at an unprecedented pace. To be sure, mechanical methods were not immediately introduced into all industrial branches. In some branches even the old handicraft methods have survived. Such survivals, however, instead of tending to prolong former conditions, usually lead, as has been the case in the tailoring industry, to sweat-shop labor. That is, they produce the class of laborers least able to resist their masters.

But the tendency is to introduce machines into all departments of industry. The effect on the power of resistance developed in the working-class is of the utmost importance. In the first place this change tends to divide the workers into two classes, skilled and unskilled. The former class includes all whose work requires any special degree of skill or efficiency. The latter includes, of course, all those who perform such labor as can be done by any one having the requisite strength. The characteristic mark of members of this latter class is to be found in the fact that they can be easily replaced.

It was naturally the skilled workers who began the struggle for better conditions. The fact that it was difficult to find substitutes for them in case of a strike gave them an important strategic advantage. Their position was not unlike that of the medieval apprentices, and in many respects their unions were natural descendants of the guilds.

But if modern skilled laborers inherited certain advantages from their predecessors, they also took over from them one tendency which has done great harm to the modern labor movement. This is the tendency to separate the various crafts. Naturally those in the best position to fight have won for themselves superior advantages and have come to look upon themselves as an aristocracy of labor. Looking only at their own interest, they have been content to rise at the expense of their less fortunate comrades.

Far-sighted politicians and industrial leaders have not been slow to take advantage of this condition. Today the worst enemies of the working-class are not the stupid, reactionary statesmen who hope to keep down the labor movement through openly repressive measures. Its worst enemies are the pretended friends who encourage craft unions, and thus attempt to cut off the skilled trades from the rest of their class. They are trying to turn the most efficient division of the proletarian army against the great mass, against those whose position as unskilled workers makes them least capable of defense.

But sooner or later the aristocratic tendency of even the most highly skilled class of laborers will be broken. As mechanical production advances, one craft after another is tumbled into the abyss of common labor. This fact is constantly teaching even the most effectively organized divisions that in the long run their position is dependent upon the strength of the working-class as a whole. They

come to the conclusion that it is a mistaken policy to attempt to rise on the shoulders of those who are sinking in a quicksand. They come to see that the struggles of other divisions of the proletariat are by no means foreign to them.

At the same time one division of the unskilled after another rises out of its stupid lethargy or mere purposeless discontent. This is in part a natural consequence of the successes achieved by the skilled laborers. The direct results of the activities of the unskilled proletarians may seem unimportant, nevertheless it is these activities that bring about the moral regeneration of this division of the working-class.

Thus there has gradually formed from skilled and unskilled workers a body of proletarians who are in the movement of labor, or the labor movement. It is the part of the proletariat which is fighting for the interests of the whole class, its church militant, as it were. This division grows at the expense both of the "aristocrats of labor" and of the common mob which still vegetates, helpless and hopeless. We have already seen that the laboring proletariat is constantly increasing; we know, further, that it tends more and more to set the pace in thought and feeling for the other working classes. We now see that in this growing mass of workers the militant division increases not only absolutely, but relatively. No matter how fast the proletariat may grow, this militant division of it grows still faster.

But it is precisely this militant proletariat which is the most fruitful recruiting ground for socialism. The socialist movement is nothing more than the part of this militant proletariat which has become conscious of its goal. In fact, these two, socialism and the militant proletariat, tend constantly to become identical. In Germany and Austria their identity is already an accomplished fact.

9. The Political Struggle.

The original organizations of the proletariat were modeled after those of the medieval apprentices. In like manner the first weapons of the modern labor movement were those inherited from a previous age, the strike and the boycott.

But these methods are insufficient for the modern proletariat. The more completely the various divisions of which it is made up unite into a single working-class movement, the more must its struggles take on a political character. Every class-struggle is a political struggle.

Even the bare requirements of the industrial struggle force the workers to make political demands. We have seen that the modern state regards it as its principal function to make the effective organization of labor impossible. Secret organizations are inefficient substitutes for open ones. The more the proletariat develops, the more it needs freedom to organize.

But this freedom is not alone sufficient if the proletariat is to have adequate organizations. The apprentices and journeymen of previous periods found it easy to act together. The various cities were industrially independent. In any given city the number of those engaged in any trade was comparatively small. They usually lived on one street and spent their leisure time at the same tavern. Each one was personally acquainted with all the rest.

Today conditions are radically different. In every industrial center there are gathered thousands of working-men. A single individual can know personally only a few of his comrades. To make this great mass feel its common interests, to induce it to act as one in an organization, it is necessary to have means of communicating with large numbers. A free press and the right of assemblage are absolutely essential.

The free press is made especially necessary by the development of modern means of communi-

cation. It is possible now for a capitalist to import strike-breakers from far-lying districts. Unless the workers can organize unions covering the entire nation, or even the entire civilized world, they are powerless. But this cannot be done without the aid of the press.

On this account, wherever the working-class has endeavored to improve its economic position it has made political demands, especially demands for a free press and the right of assemblage. These privileges are to the proletariat the prerequisites of life; they are the light and air of the labor movement. Whoever attempts to deny them, no matter what his pretensions, is to be reckoned among the worst enemies of the working-class.

Occasionally some one has attempted to oppose the political struggle to the economic, and declared that the proletariat should give its exclusive attention either to the one or the other. The fact is that the two cannot be separated. The economic struggle demands political rights, and these will not fall from heaven. To secure and maintain them, the most vigorous political action is necessary. The political struggle is, on the other hand, in the last analysis, an economic struggle. Often, in fact, it is directly and openly economic, as when it deals with tariff and factory laws. The political struggle is merely a particular form of the economic struggle, in fact, its most inclusive and vital form.

The interest of the working-class is not limited to the laws which directly affect it; the great majority of laws touch its interests to some extent. Like every other class, the working-class must strive to influence the state authorities, to bend them to its purposes.

Great capitalists can influence rulers and legislators directly, but the workers can do so only through parliamentary activity. It matters little whether a government be republican in name. In all parliamentary countries it rests with the legislative body to grant tax levies. By electing representatives to parliament, therefore, the working-class can exercise an influence over the governmental powers.

The struggle of all the classes which depend upon legislative action for political influence is directed, in the modern state, on the one hand toward an increase in the power of the parliament (or congress), and on the other toward an increase in their own influence within the parliament. The power of parliament depends on the energy and courage of the classes behind it and on the energy and courage of the classes on which its will is to be imposed. The influence of a class within a parliament depends, in the first place, on the nature of the electoral law in force. It is dependent, further, upon the influence of the class in question among the voters, and, lastly, upon its aptitude for parliamentary work.

A word must be added on this last point. The bourgeoisie, with all sorts of talent at its command, has hitherto been able to manipulate parliaments to its own purpose. Therefore, small capitalists and farmers have in large numbers lost all faith in legislative action. Some of these have declared in favor of the substitution of direct legislation for legislation by representatives; others have denounced all forms of political activity. This may sound very revolutionary, but in reality it indicates nothing but the political bankruptcy of the classes involved.

The proletariat is, however, more favorably situated in regard to parliamentary activity. We have already seen how the modern method of production reacts on the intellectual life of the proletariat, how it has awakened in them a thirst for knowledge and given them an understanding of great social problems. So far as their attitude toward politics is concerned, they are raised far above the farmers and small capitalists. It is easier for them to grasp party principles and act on them uninfluenced by personal and local motives. Their conditions of life, moreover, make it possible for them to act together in great numbers for a common end. Their regular forms of activity accustom them to rigid discipline. Their unions are to them an excellent parliamentary school; they afford opportunities

for training in parliamentary law and public speaking.

The proletariat is, therefore, in a position to form an independent party. It knows how to control its representatives. Moreover, it finds in its own ranks an increasing number of persons well fitted to represent it in legislative halls.

Whenever the proletariat engages in parliamentary activity as a self-conscious class, parliamentarism begins to change its character. It ceases to be a mere tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie. This very participation of the proletariat proves to be the most effective means of shaking up the hitherto indifferent divisions of the proletariat and giving them hope and confidence. It is the most powerful lever that can be utilized to raise the proletariat out of its economic, social and moral degradation.

The proletariat has, therefore, no reason to distrust parliamentary action; on the other hand, it has every reason to exert all its energy to increase the power of parliaments in their relation to other departments of government and to swell to the utmost its own parliamentary representation. Besides freedom of the press and the right to organize, the universal ballot is to be regarded as one of the conditions prerequisite to a sound development of the proletariat.

10. The Labor Party

In the first place the ballot was useful to the working-class only because it now and then made various sections of the bourgeoisie dependent on it for favors. In their internal struggles capitalist factions, as, for example, the industrial capitalists or the landlords, would offer advantages to the proletariat for the sake of securing its support. Though this procedure often resulted in valuable concessions, nevertheless so long as the working-class went no further in its political activities there was a definite limit to its possibilities.

The interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are of so contrary a nature that in the long run they cannot be harmonized. Sooner or later in every capitalist country the participation of the working-class in politics must lead to the formation of an independent party, a labor party.

At what moment in its history the proletariat of any particular country will reach the point at which it is ready to take this step, depends chiefly upon its economic development. In some degree, also, it depends upon two other conditions, the insight of the working-class into the political and economic situation and the attitude of the bourgeois parties toward one another.

But an independent labor party is bound to come sooner or later. And, once formed, such a party must have for its purpose the conquest of the government in the interest of the class which it represents. Economic development will lead naturally to the accomplishment of this purpose. The time and manner of its accomplishment may vary in different lands, but there can be no doubt as to the final victory of the proletariat. For this class grows constantly in moral and political power as well as in numbers. The class-struggle widens its view and teaches it solidarity and discipline. In capitalist countries it tends constantly to become the only working class, hence the class upon which all others are dependent. On the other hand, the classes opposed to the proletariat diminish constantly in numbers and lose visibly in moral and political power. In industry they become, not only superfluous, but often actually detrimental.

Under these circumstances there can be no doubt as to which side will eventually be victorious. Long ago the possessing classes were seized with fear of their approaching fate.

But the proletariat, as the lowest of the exploited classes – the slum-proletariat is not exploited – cannot use its power, as the other classes have done, to shift the burden of exploitation to other shoulders. It must put an end to its own exploitation and in the same act to all exploitation. The

root of exploitation, however, is to be found in private ownership of the means of production. The proletariat can do away with the former only by destroying the latter. If the propertyless condition of the proletariat makes possible its winning over to the abolition of this form of private property, its exploitation will compel it to abolish exploitation and to substitute co-operative for capitalist production.

But we have seen that this cannot come about so long as commodity production remains supreme. In order to substitute co-operative for capitalist production it is absolutely necessary to replace production for the market with production for the community and under the control of the community. Socialist production is, therefore, the natural result of a victory of the proletariat. If the working-class did not make use of its mastery over the machinery of government to introduce the socialist system of production, the logic of events would finally call some such system into being – but only after a useless waste of energy and time. But socialist production must, and will, come. Its victory will have become inevitable as soon as that of the proletariat has become inevitable. The working-class will naturally strive to put an end to exploitation, and this it can do only through socialist production.

Thus it appears that wherever an independent labor party is formed it must sooner or later exhibit socialist tendencies; if not socialist in the beginning, it must become so in the end.

We have now examined the chief recruiting grounds of socialism. Our results may be summed up as follows: the militant, politically self-conscious divisions of the industrial proletariat furnish the power which is behind the socialist movement; but the more the influence of the proletariat affects the ways of thinking and feeling in vogue among allied social groups, the more will these, also, be drawn into the movement.

11. The Labor Movement and Socialism

In the beginning socialists were slow to recognize the part which the militant proletariat is called upon to play in the socialist movement. It could not be otherwise, in the nature of things, so long as there was no militant proletariat. And socialism is older than the class-struggle of the proletariat. It dates back to the time of the first appearance of the proletariat on a large scale. It was not until much later that the proletarians showed the first stirrings of independent life. The first root of socialism was the sympathy of upper-class philanthropists with the poor and miserable. The early socialists were merely the bravest and most far-sighted of these philanthropists. They saw clearly that the existence of the proletariat was a natural result of the private ownership of the means of production, and they did not hesitate to draw the logical conclusions from their observation. Socialism was the deepest and most splendid expression of bourgeois philanthropy.

There were no class interests to which the socialists of that day could appeal; they were forced to turn to the sympathy and enthusiasm of upper-class idealists. They attempted to secure support by means of alluring descriptions of a socialist commonwealth, on the one side, and persistent representations of the prevailing misery, on the other. The rich and mighty were to be persuaded to furnish means for a thoroughgoing relief of misery and the institution of an ideal society. As is well known, these philanthropic socialists waited in vain for the noblemen and millionaires whose magnanimity was to save the race.

During the first decades of the nineteenth century the proletariat began to show signs of an independent life. During the thirties a vigorous labor movement got under way in France and England.

But the socialists did not understand it. They thought it impossible for the poor and ignorant

proletarians to attain to the moral elevation and social power requisite for the realization of the socialist plans. But distrust was not their only feeling toward the labor movement. This new phenomenon was inconvenient to them; it threatened to rob them of their most effective argument. For the bourgeois socialists' only hope of winning over the sensitive capitalist lay in being able to show him that every attempt to alleviate misery and elevate the poor was doomed to failure by the conditions of modern society and that, consequently, it was impossible for the proletarians to rise through their own efforts. But the labor movement proceeded upon premises absolutely opposed to this line of argument. Another fact tended to bring about the same result. The class-struggle naturally embittered the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. In the eyes of the capitalists the working-class were transformed from pitiful unfortunates who needed help into a pack of miscreants who should be subdued and kept down. Sympathy for the poor and miserable, which had been the chief root of socialism, began to wither. The teachings of socialism came to appear to the terror-stricken bourgeoisie as a dangerous weapon which might fall into the hands of the mob and bring about unspeakable harm. In short, the stronger the labor movement appeared the more difficult became socialist propaganda among the ruling classes, and the more well-defined became the opposition of these classes to the socialist movement.

So long as socialists were of the opinion that the means of attaining the objects of socialism must come from the capitalist class, they were compelled, not only to look with suspicion upon the labor movement, but often to assume an attitude of direct opposition to it. As a result they came to regard the class-struggle as the enemy of socialism.

This naturally reacted upon the laboring classes, tended to make of them enemies of socialism. The ambitious, struggling proletarians discovered nothing but opposition among the socialists and nothing but discouragement in the socialist teachings. As a result, there was born among them a distrust of the whole body of socialist doctrine. This feeling was favored by the ignorance even of the militant proletariat at the beginning of the labor movement. The narrowness of their view made it impossible for them to grasp the purposes of socialism, and as yet they were unconscious of their economic position and of the tasks which confronted their class. They felt only an indefinite class instinct which taught them to distrust everything that had its origin in the capitalist class. Under the circumstances they were naturally as much opposed to socialism as to any other form of bourgeois philanthropy.

Among certain groups of working-men, especially in England, distrust of socialism took deep root at this time. It is partly because of this that until recently England has been comparatively unaffected by the socialist movement.

But no matter how wide might grow the chasm between socialism and the militant proletariat, socialist philosophy is so adequate to the needs of thinking proletarians that the best minds in the working-class, as soon as they had opportunity, willingly turned to it. Then the bourgeois socialist came under the influence of proletarian thinking. The new, proletarian socialists took little account of the capitalist class. They hated it and were fighting against it. In their hands the peaceful socialism which was to save the race through the intervention of the best elements in the upper classes was transformed into a violent revolutionary socialism which was to depend for its support upon proletarian fists.

But even this movement, though essentially proletarian in its origin, had no understanding of the labor movement; it stood in opposition to the class-struggle in its highest form, that is, the political struggle. In the nature of the case it was impossible for it to transcend the theories of the utopians. At best a proletarian can do no more than appropriate for his own purposes a part of the learning of the bourgeois world. He lacks the leisure necessary to carry independent scientific investigation

beyond the point reached by bourgeois thinkers. Therefore primitive working-class socialism bore all the marks of utopianism. It had no notion of the economic evolution which is creating the material elements of socialist production and, by means of a long struggle, is training the class that is to vitalize these elements and develop from them a new society. Like the utopians, the early proletarian socialists looked upon society as a building which could be constructed arbitrarily according to a preconceived plan if one had only the required space and materials. They trusted themselves to furnish the power both to build and to preserve this structure. As to the materials and place, they did not expect these from the bounty of some millionaire or nobleman; the revolution was to be sufficient to tear down the old structure, to overpower its defenders, and give the discoverers of the new plan an opportunity to build the new structure, the socialist commonwealth.

In this course of reasoning there was no place for the class-struggle. The proletarian utopians found the misery in which they lived so bitter that they were impatient for its immediate removal. Even if they had thought it possible for the class-struggle to raise the proletariat gradually, and thus fit them for the further development of society, this process would have seemed to them much too tedious and complex. But they did not believe in this gradual elevation. They stood at the beginning of the labor movement. The group of proletarians who participated in it were few, and among these only a still smaller number saw beyond their temporary interests. To train the great mass of the population in socialist ways of thinking seemed hopeless. The most that could be expected of this mass was a violent outbreak which might destroy the existing order and thus clear the way for socialism. The worse the condition of the masses, thought these primitive socialists, the nearer must be the moment when their misery would become unbearable and they would rise and topple over the social structure which oppressed them. A struggle for the gradual elevation of the working-class seemed not only hopeless, but harmful. For any slight improvement that might be achieved could only tend to postpone the moment of their uprising and, therefore, the moment of permanent release from misery. Every form of the class-struggle which was not aimed at the immediate overthrow of the existing order, that is, every serious, efficient sort of effort, seemed to the early socialist as nothing more nor less than a betrayal of humanity. It is now more than fifty years since this way of looking at things made its appearance. Its best expression it received, probably, in the works of Wilhelm Weitling. Even today it has not died out. The tendency toward it appears in every division of the working-class which begins to take its place in the ranks of the militant proletariat. It appears in every land where the proletariat becomes for the first time conscious of its degraded condition and imbued with socialistic notions, without at the same time having reached a clear insight into social laws and gained confidence in its ability to carry on a protracted struggle. And since new divisions of the proletariat are constantly rising out of the depths into which economic development has thrust them, this primitive socialist way of thinking may be expected continually to make its reappearance. It is a children's disease which threatens every young socialist movement which has not got beyond utopianism.

At present this sort of socialistic thinking is called anarchy, but it is not necessarily connected with anarchism. It has its origin, not in clear understanding, but rather in mere instinctive opposition to the existing order. Therefore it may be connected with the most varied theoretical points of view. But it is true that the rude and violent socialism of the primitive proletarians is often associated with the refined and peaceable anarchy of the small bourgeois. With all their differences these two have one thing in common, hatred of the protracted class-struggle, especially of its highest form, the political struggle.

The proletarian utopians were no more able than their forerunners to overcome the opposition between socialism and the labor movement. It is true that conditions occasionally compelled them

to take active part in the class-struggle. But they were too illogical to see the connection between socialism and the labor movement. Therefore their activity merely resulted in the crowding out of the former by the latter. It is well known that the early anarchist-socialist movement sank sooner or later either into pure-and-simple craft unionism or mere co-operative communism.

12. The Socialist Party – Union of the Labor Movement and Socialism

If the socialist movement and the labor movement were ever to become one it was necessary for socialism to be raised beyond the utopian point of view. To accomplish this was the illustrious work of Marx and Engels. In their *Communist Manifesto*, published in 1847, they laid the scientific foundation of modern socialism. They transformed the beautiful dream of well-meaning enthusiasts into the goal of a great and earnest struggle, they proved it to be the natural result of economic development. To the militant proletariat they gave a clear conception of their historical function, and placed them in a position to proceed toward their great goal with as much speed and as few sacrifices as possible. The socialists are no longer expected to discover a new and free social order; all they have to do is discover the elements of such an order in existing society. They need no longer attempt to bring to the proletariat salvation from above. On the other hand, it becomes their duty to support the working-class in its constant struggle by encouraging its political and economic institutions. It must do all in its power to hasten the day when the working-class will be able to save itself. To give to the class-struggle of the proletariat the most effective form, this is the function of the Socialist Party.

The teaching of Marx and Engels gave to the class-struggle of the proletariat an entirely new character. So long as socialist production is not kept consciously in view as its object, so long as the efforts of the militant proletariat do not extend beyond the framework of the existing method of production, the class-struggle seems to move forever in a circle. For the oppressive tendencies of the capitalist method of production are not done away with; at most they are only checked. Without cessation, new groups of the middle class are thrown into the proletariat. The desire for profits constantly threatens to bring to nought the achievements of the more favorably situated divisions of labor. Every reduction in the hours of labor becomes an excuse for the introduction of labor-saving machinery and for the intensification of labor. Every improvement in the organization of labor is answered with an improvement in the organization of capital. And all the time unemployment increases, crises become more serious, and the uncertainty of existence grows more unendurable. The elevation of the working-class brought about by the class-struggle is more moral than economic. The industrial conditions of the proletariat improve but slowly, if at all. But the self-respect of the proletarians mounts higher, as does also the respect paid them by the other classes of society. They begin to regard themselves as the equals of the upper classes and to compare the conditions of the other strata of society with their own. They make greater demands on society, demands for better clothes, better dwellings, greater knowledge and the education of their children. They wish to have some share in the achievements of modern civilization. And they feel with increasing keenness every set-back, every new form of oppression.

This moral elevation of the proletariat is identical with the increasing demands which it makes on society. Moreover it advances more rapidly than the conditions of labor which necessarily prevail under the present system of exploitation. The result of the class-struggle can, therefore, be nothing else, than increasing discontent among the proletarians. And therefore the class-struggle appears purposeless so long as it does not look beyond the present system of production.

Only socialist production can put an end to the disparity between the demands of the workers

and the means of satisfying them. By doing away with exploitation it would render impossible the luxuries of the exploiters and the natural discontent of the exploited. With the removal of the standard set by the rich the demands of the workers would, of course, be measured by the means at hand to satisfy them. We have already seen how much the socialist method of production would increase these means.

Perpetual discontent is unknown in communistic societies. In our capitalistic world it results naturally from the distinction of classes wherever the exploited feel themselves to be the equals of the exploiters.

So long, therefore, as the class-struggle of the proletariat was opposed to socialism, So long as it did nothing beyond attempting to improve the position of the proletariat within the framework of existing society, it could not reach its goal. But: a great change came with the amalgamation of socialism and the labor movement. Now the proletariat has a goal toward which it is struggling, which it comes nearer to with every battle. Now all features of the class-struggle have a meaning, even those that produce no immediately practical results. Every effort that preserves or increases the self-consciousness of the proletariat or its spirit of co-operation and discipline, is worth the making.

Many an apparent defeat is turned into a victory. Every unsuccessful strike, every labor law defeated, means a step toward the securing of a life worthy of human beings. Every political or industrial measure which has reference to the proletariat has a good effect. Whether it be friendly or unfriendly, matters not, so long as it tends to stir up the working-class. From now on the militant proletariat is no longer like an army fighting hard to defend positions already won; now it must become clear to the dullest onlooker that it is an irresistible conqueror.

13. The International Character of the Socialist Movement

The founders of modern socialism recognized from the beginning the international character which the labor movement tends everywhere to assume. So they naturally attempted to give their movement an international basis.

International commerce is inevitably connected with the capitalist system of production. The development of capitalism out of early, simple production of commodities is most intimately connected with the growth of world-commerce. But world-commerce is impossible without peaceful intercourse among the various nations. It requires that a foreign merchant be protected equally with a native.

The development of international commerce raises the merchant to a high position in our society. His way of looking at things begins to influence society as a whole. But the merchant has always been an unsettled person; his motto has ever been, Where I fare well, there is my home. Thus in proportion to the extension of world-commerce and capitalist production there develop international tendencies in bourgeois society.

The capitalist system of production, however, develops the most remarkable contradictions. Hand in hand with the movement toward international brotherhood goes a tendency to emphasize international differences. Commerce demands peace, but competition leads to war. If, in each country, the different capitalists and classes are in a state of war, so are the capitalist classes of the various countries. Each nation tries to extend the markets for its own goods by crowding out: the goods of other nations. The more complex becomes international commerce, the more essential international peace, the fiercer grows the competitive struggle and the greater the danger of conflicts between nations. The closer the international relations which are developed, the louder

swells the demand for attention to separate national interests. The more urgent the need of peace, the greater the danger of war. These apparently impossible antitheses correspond exactly to the character of capitalist production. They lie hidden in the simple production of commodities, but only capitalist production develops them till they become intolerable. That it develops at the same time the necessity of peace and the tendency toward war is only one of the contradictions which will bring about the destruction of the capitalist system.

The proletariat has not assumed the inconsistent attitude with regard to this matter that is characteristic of the other classes. The more the working-class develops and becomes independent, the clearer becomes the fact that it is influenced by only one of the opposing tendencies which we have just observed in the capitalist system. The capitalist system, by expropriating the worker, has freed him from the soil. He has now no settled home, and therefore no country. Like the merchant, he can take for his motto, *Where I fare well, there is my home*. Even the medieval apprentices extended their wanderings to foreign lands, and the beginning of an international relation was the result. But what were these wanderings in comparison with those made possible by modern means of travel? And the apprentice journeyed with the intention of returning to his home; the modern proletarian journeys with his wife and family in order to settle wherever he finds conditions most favorable. He is not a tourist, but a nomad.

The merchant in a foreign country depends upon his government for the support which is necessary to successful competition. He appreciates his country; often enough, in fact, he becomes the most confirmed among the jingos. It is different with the proletarian. At home he has not been spoiled by government protection of his interests. And in foreign lands, at least in such as are civilized, he has no need of protection. On the contrary, the new land is usually one in which the laws and their administration are more favorable to the worker than those of his original home. And his co-workers have no motive for depriving him of what little protection he can get from the law in his struggle against his exploiter. Their interest lies rather in increasing his ability to withstand the common enemy.

Very differently from the apprentice or the merchant is the modern proletarian torn loose from the soil. He becomes a citizen of the world; the whole world is his home.

No doubt this world-citizenship is a great hardship for the workers in countries where the standard of living is high and the conditions of labor are comparatively good. In such countries, naturally, immigration will exceed emigration. As a result the laborers with the higher standard of living will be hindered in their class-struggle by the influx of those with a lower standard and less power of resistance.

Under certain circumstances this sort of competition, like that of the capitalists, may lead to a new emphasis on national lines, a new hatred of foreign workers on the part of the native born. But the conflict of nationalities, which is perpetual among the capitalists, can be only temporary among the proletarians. For sooner or later the workers will discover that the immigration of cheap labor-power from the more backward to the more advanced countries, is as inevitable a result of the capitalist system as the introduction of machinery or the forcing of women into industry.

In still another way does the labor movement of an advanced country suffer under the influence of the backward conditions of other lands. The high degree of exploitation endured by the proletariat of the economically undeveloped nations becomes an excuse for the capitalists of the more highly developed ones for opposing any movement in the direction of higher wages or better conditions.

In more than one way, then, it is borne in upon the workers of each nation that their success in the class-struggle is dependent on the progress of the working-class of other nations. For a time this may turn them against foreign workers, but finally they come to see that there is only one effective

means of removing the hindering influence of backward nations: to do away with the backwardness itself. German workers have every reason to co-operate with the Slavs and Italians in order that these may secure higher wages and a shorter working-day; the English workers have the same interest in relation to the Germans, and the Americans in relation to Europeans in general.

The dependence of the proletariat of one land on that of another leads inevitably to a joining of forces by the militant proletarians of various lands.

The survivals of national seclusion and national hatred which the proletariat took over from the bourgeoisie, disappear steadily. The working-class is freeing itself from national prejudices. Working-men learn more and more to see in the foreign laborer a fellow-fighter, a comrade.

The strongest bonds of international solidarity, naturally, are those which bind groups of proletarians, which, though of different nationalities, have the same purposes and use the same methods to accomplish them.

How necessary is the international union of the class-struggles of the proletariat, as soon as they extend beyond a certain limit in purpose and strength, was recognized in the beginning by the authors of the *Communist Manifesto*. This historic document is addressed to the proletarians of all lands and concludes by calling upon them to unite. And the organization which they had won over to the acceptance of the principles of the manifesto, and in the name of which it was issued, was international, the Society of Communists.

The defeats of the revolutionary movements of 1848 and 1849 put an end to this society, but with the re-awakening of the labor movement in the sixties it came to life again in the International Workingmen's Association (founded in 1864). This association had for its purpose, not only to arouse a feeling of solidarity in the proletarians of different lands, but also to give them a common goal and lead them toward it by a common route. The first of these purposes was gloriously fulfilled, but the second was fulfilled only in part. The International was to bring about the union of socialism and the militant proletariat in all lands. It declared that the emancipation of the working-class could be accomplished only by the workers themselves; that the political movement was only a means to this end, and that the proletariat could not emancipate itself so long as it remained dependent upon the monopolists of the means of production. Within the International opposition to these principles developed in proportion to the clearness with which they were seen to lead to modern socialism. At that time there was still a comparatively large number of bourgeois and proletarian utopians. These, together with the pure-and-simple unionists, dropped out of the International as soon as they understood its purpose. The fall of the Paris Commune, in 1871, and persecutions in various European countries, hastened its fall.

But the consciousness of international solidarity that had been generated could not be smothered.

Since then the ideas of the *Communist Manifesto* have taken hold of the militant proletariat of Europe and of many proletarian groups outside of Europe. Everywhere the class-struggle and the socialist movement have become one, or are in a fair way to do so. The principles, objects and means of the proletarian class-struggle tend everywhere to become the same. This in itself has been sufficient to produce a feeling of union among the socialistic labor movements of different countries. Their international consciousness has constantly grown stronger, and it needed only an external impulse to give to this fact visible expression.

This came about, as is well known, in connection with the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, which occurred at the International Congress of Paris in 1889. Since then the international character of the proletarian struggle has had a visible symbol in the May Day celebration. It has been strengthened, moreover, by regularly recurring international

congresses. These congresses are made up, not of isolated enthusiasts, like the bourgeois peace congresses, but of the representatives of millions of working men and women. Every May Day shows in the most impressive manner that it is the masses of industrial workers in all the great centers of population of all civilized lands that feel in themselves the consciousness of the international solidarity of the proletariat, that protest against war and declare that national divisions are no longer divisions between peoples, but between exploiters.

Such a bridging of the chasm between the nations, such an international amalgamation of great sections of the people of different lands, the history of the world has never seen before. This phenomenon appears the more imposing when we remember that it has come into existence under the shadow of military armaments which, on their part, also offer a spectacle the like of which has never before been seen in the world.

IV. The Commonwealth of the Future

3. Socialist Production

The abolition of the present system of production means substituting production for use for production for sale. Production for use may be of two forms:

First, individual production for the satisfaction of individual wants; and,

Second, social or co-operative production for the satisfaction of the wants of a commonwealth.

The first form of production has never been a general form of production. Man has always been a social being, as far back as we can trace him. The individual has always been thrown upon co-operation with others in order to satisfy some of his principal wants; others had to work for him and he, in turn, had to work for others. Individual production for self-consumption has always played a subordinate part; today it hardly deserves mention.

Until the present system of production (production for sale) was developed, co-operative production for common use was the leading form; it is as old as production itself. If any one system of production could be considered better adapted than any other to the nature of man, then co-operative production must be pronounced the natural one. In all probability for every thousand years of production for sale, cooperative production for use numbers tens of thousands. The character, extent and power of co-operative societies have changed along with the instruments and methods of production which they adopted. Nevertheless, whether such a commonwealth was a horde or a tribe or any other form of community, they all had certain essential features in common. Each satisfied its own wants, at least the most vital ones, with the product of its own labor; the instruments of production were the property of the community; its members worked together as free and equal individuals according to some plan inherited or devised, and administered by some power elected by themselves. The product of such co-operative labor was the property of the community and was applied either to the satisfaction of common wants, whether these were occasioned by production or consumption, or were distributed among the individuals or groups which composed the community.

The well-being of such self-supporting communities or societies depended upon natural and personal conditions. The more fertile the territory they occupied, the more diligent, inventive and vigorous their members, the greater was the general well-being. Drouths, freshets, invasions by more powerful enemies, might afflict, or even destroy, them, but there was one visitation they were free from, the fluctuations of the market. With this they were either wholly unacquainted, or they knew it only in connection with articles of luxury.

Such co-operative production for use is nothing less than communistic or, as it is called today, socialist production. Production for sale can be overcome only by such a system. Socialist production is the only system of production possible when production for sale has become impossible.

This fact does not, however, imply that it is necessary to revive the dead past or to restore the old forms of community property or communal production. These forms were adapted to certain means of production; they were, and continue to be, inapplicable to more highly developed instruments of production. It was for that reason that they disappeared almost everywhere in the course of economic development at the approach of the system of production for sale, and wherever they did resist the latter, their effect was to interfere with the development of productive powers. As reactionary and hopeless as were the efforts to resist the system of production for sale, would be today any endeavor to overthrow the present by a revival of the old communal system.

The system of socialist production which has become necessary, owing to the impending bankruptcy of our present system of production for sale, will and must have certain features in common with the older systems of communal production, in so far, namely, as both are systems of co-operative production for use. In the same way, the capitalist system of production bears some resemblance to the system of small and individual production, which forms the transition between it and communal production; both produce for sale. Just as the capitalist system of production, as a higher development of commodity production, is different from small production, so will the form of social production, that has now become necessary be different from the former systems of production for use.

The coming system of socialist production will not be the sequel to ancient communism; it will be the sequel to the capitalist system of production, which itself develops the elements that are requisite for the organization of its successor. It brings forth the new people whom the new system of production needs. But it also brings forth the social organization which, as soon as the new people have mastered it, will become the foundation stone of the new system of production.

Socialist production requires, in the first place, the transformation of the separate capitalist establishments into social institutions. This transformation is being prepared for by the circumstance that the personality of the capitalist is steadily becoming more and more superfluous in the present mechanism of production. In the second place, it requires that all the establishments requisite for the satisfaction of the wants of the commonwealth be united into one large concern. How economic development is preparing the way for this by the steady concentration of capitalist concerns, has been explained in the foregoing chapter.

What must be the size of such a self-sufficing commonwealth? As the socialist republic is not an arbitrary creation of the brain, but a necessary product of economic development, the size of such a commonwealth cannot be predetermined. It must conform to the stage of social development out of which it grows. The higher the development that has been reached, the greater the division of labor that has been perfected, the more intercourse has developed between the producers – the larger will be the size of the commonwealth.

It is now nearly two hundred years since a well-meaning Englishman, John Bellers, submitted to the English Parliament a plan to end the misery which even then the capitalist system, young as it was, spreading through the land. He proposed the establishment of communities that should produce everything that they needed, industrial as well as agricultural products. According to his plan, each community needed only from two hundred to three hundred workmen.

At that time handicraft was still the leading form of production; the capitalist system was still in the manufacturing stage; as yet there was no thought of the capitalist concern with its modern machinery.

A hundred years later the same idea was taken up anew, but considerably deepened and perfected, by socialist thinkers. By that time the present factory system of mills and machinery had already begun; handicrafts were here and there disappearing; society had reached a higher stage. Accordingly, the communities which the socialists proposed at the beginning of the nineteenth century for the purpose of removing the ills of the capitalist system were ten times larger than those proposed by Bellers (for instance, the phalansteries Fourier).

In comparison with the economic conditions of the time of Bellers, those which Fourier knew seemed wonderfully advanced; but from the point of view of a generation later these, in their turn, had become trivial. The machine was restlessly revolutionizing social life; it had expanded capitalist undertakings to such an extent that some of them already embraced whole nations in their operations; it had brought the several undertakings of a country into greater dependence upon one another so that they virtually constituted one industry; and it constantly tends to turn the whole economic life of capitalist nations into a single economic mechanism. The division and subdivision of labor is carried on further and further; the several industries apply themselves more and more to the production of special articles only; and what is more, to their production for the whole world; and the size of these establishments, some of which count their workmen by thousands, becomes constantly larger.

Under such circumstances, a community designed to satisfy its wants and embracing all the requisite industries, must have dimensions very different from those of the socialist colonies planned at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Among the social organizations in existence today there is but one that has the requisite dimensions, that can be used as the requisite field, for the establishment and development of the Socialist or Co-operative Commonwealth, and that is the modern state.

Indeed, so great is the development that production has reached in some industries and so intimate have become the connections between the several capitalist nations that one might almost question whether the limits of the state are sufficiently inclusive to contain the Co-operative Commonwealth.

Nevertheless, there is something else to be taken into account. The present expansion of international intercourse is due, not so much to the existing conditions of production as to the existing condition of exploitation. The greater the extension of capitalist production in a country and the intenser the exploitation of the working class, the larger also, as a rule, is the surplus of products that cannot be consumed in the country itself and that, consequently, must be sent abroad. If the population of the country have not themselves the means to buy the staples which they produce, the capitalists go with their products in search of foreign customers, whether or not the population of their own country stand in need of the products. The capitalists are after purchasers, not after consumers. This explains the horrible phenomenon that Ireland and India export large quantities of wheat during a famine; recently, during the frightful famine in Russia, the exportation of wheat by the Russian capitalists could be checked only by an imperial order. When exploitation shall have ceased, and production for use shall have taken the place of production for sale, exportation and importation of products from one state to another will fall off greatly.

The existing commerce between the several nations will not entirely disappear. The division of labor has been carried on so far, the market which certain giant industries require for their products has become so extensive, and, on the other hand, so many commodities – supplied only by international commerce – coffee, for instance – have become necessities, that it seems impossible for any Co-operative Commonwealth, even though co-extensive with a nation, to satisfy all its wants with its own products. Some sort of exchange of products between one nation and another is sure to

continue. Such exchange will not, however, endanger the economic independence and safety of the several nations so long as they produce all that is actually necessary and exchange with one another superfluities only. A co-operative commonwealth co-extensive with the nation could produce all that it requires for its own preservation.

This dimension would by no means be unalterable. The modern nation is but a product and tool of the capitalist system of production; it grows with that system, not only in power, but also in extent. The domestic market is the safest for the capitalist class of every country. It is the easiest to maintain and to exploit. In proportion as the capitalist system develops, so also grows the pressure on the part of the capitalist class in every nation for an extension of its political boundaries. The statesman who maintained that modern wars are no longer manifestations of dynastic, but of national, aspirations was not far from the truth, provided one understands by national aspirations the aspirations of the capitalist class. Nothing so much injures the vital interests of the capitalists of any nation as a reduction of their territory. The capitalist class of France would long ago have pardoned Germany the \$1,250,000,000 which she demanded as an indemnity for the war of 1870, but can never pardon the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine.

All modern nations feel the necessity of extending their boundaries. This is easiest for the United States, which will soon actually control all America, and for England, which is enabled by its sea power to expand the extent of its colonies without interruption. Russia also enjoyed at one time great advantages in this respect, but the limits of her aggrandizement seem to have been reached; she is bounded on all sides by nations which resist her advancement. Worst off are the nations of continental Europe in this respect; they, as well as others, require territorial expansion, but they are so closely hemmed in by one another that none can grow except at the expense of some other. The colonial policy of these states affords inadequate relief to the need of expansion caused by their capitalist system of production. This situation is the most powerful cause of the militarism which has turned Europe into a military camp. There are but two ways out of this intolerable state of things: either a gigantic war that shall destroy some of the existing European states, or the union of them all in a federation.

This is enough to show that every modern state has the desire to expand in response to the demands of economic development. In this way each is seeing to it that its boundaries become sufficiently extensive to satisfy the needs of the coming co-operative commonwealth.

7. The "Abolition of the Family"

One of the most widespread prejudices against socialism rests upon the notion that it proposes to abolish the family.

No socialist has the remotest idea of abolishing the family, that is, legally and forcibly dissolving it. Only the grossest misrepresentation can fasten upon socialism any such intention. Moreover, it takes a fool to imagine that a form of family life can be created or abolished by decree.

The modern form of family is in no way opposed to the socialist system of production; the institution of the socialist order, therefore, does not demand the abolition of the family.

What does lead to the abolition of the present form of family life is, not the nature of cooperative production, but economic development. We have already seen in another chapter how under the present system the family is torn to pieces, husband, wife and children are separated, and celibacy and prostitution made common.

The socialist system is not calculated to check economic development; it will, on the contrary, give it a new impulse. This development will continue to draw from the circle of household duties

and turn into special industries one occupation after another. That this cannot fail to have in the future, as in the past, its effect on the sphere of woman is self-evident; woman will cease to be a worker in the individual household, and will take her place as a worker in the large industries. But this change will not be to her then, as it is today, a mere transition from household slavery to wage slavery; it will not, as it does today, hurl her from the protection of her home into the most exposed and helpless section of the proletariat. By working side by side with man in the great co-operative industries woman will become his equal and will take an equal part in the community life. She will be his free companion, emancipated not only from the servitude of the house, but also from that of capitalism. Mistress of herself, the equal of man, she will quickly put an end to all prostitution, legal and well as illegal. For the first time in history monogamy will become a real, rather than a fictitious, institution.

These are no utopian suggestions, but scientific conclusions based on definite facts. Whoever wishes to overthrow them must prove the facts non-existent. Since this cannot be done, there remains nothing for the ladies and gentlemen who wish to know nothing of this phase of our development than to become indignant and prove their morality by all manner of lies and misrepresentations. But all their demonstrations will not delay our inevitable evolution a single moment.

This much is certain: whatever alteration the traditional form of the family may undergo, it will not be the act of socialism or of the socialist system of production, but of the economic development that has been going on for the last century. Socialist society cannot retard this development; what it will do is to remove from the economic development all the painful and degrading features that are its inevitable accompaniments under the capitalist system of production. While, on the one hand, under the capitalist system of production the economic development is steadily snapping, one after another, the family bonds and destroying family life, under the socialist system of production, on the other hand, whatever existing family form may disappear, can be replaced only by a higher.

10. Socialism and Freedom.

That a socialist society would afford its members comfort and security has been admitted even by many of the opponents of socialism. "But" they say, "these advantages are bought at too dear a price; they are paid for with a total loss of freedom. The bird in a cage may have sufficient daily food; it also is secure against hunger and the inclemencies of the weather. But it has lost its freedom, and for that reason is a pitiful thing. It yearns for a chance to take its place among the dangers of the outside world, to struggle for its own existence." They maintain that socialism destroys economic freedom, the freedom of labor that it introduces a despotism in comparison with which the most unrestricted absolutism would be freedom.

So great is the fear of this slavery that even some socialists have been seized with it, and have become anarchists. They have as great a horror of communism as of production for sale, and they attempt to escape both by seeking both. They want to have communism and production for sale together. Theoretically, this is absurd; in practice, it could amount to nothing more than the establishment of voluntary cooperative societies for mutual aid.

It is true that socialist production is irreconcilable with the full freedom of labor, that is, with the freedom of the laborer to work when, where and how he wills. But this freedom of the laborer is irreconcilable with any systematic, co-operative form of labor, whether the form be capitalist or socialist. Freedom of labor is possible only in small production, and even there only up to a certain point. Even where small production is freed from all restrictive regulations, the individual worker still remains a dependent on natural or social conditions; the farmer, for example, on the

weather, the artisan on the state of the market. Nevertheless, small production offers the possibility of a certain degree of freedom; this is its ideal, the most revolutionary ideal of which the small bourgeois is capable. A hundred years ago at the time of the French Revolution this ideal was based on industrial conditions. Today it has no economic basis and can persist only in the heads of people who are unable to perceive that an economic revolution has taken place. It is not the socialist who destroy this "freedom of labor," but the resistless progress of large production. The very ones from whom is heard most frequently the declaration that labor must be free are the capitalists, those who have contributed most to overthrow that freedom.

Freedom of labor has come to an end, not only in the factory, but wherever the individual worker is only a link in a long chain of workers. It does not exist either for the manual worker or for the brain worker employed in any industry. The hospital physician, the school teacher, the railroad employee, the newspaper writer – none of these enjoy the freedom of labor; they are all bound to certain rules, they must all be at their post at a certain hour.

It is true that in one respect the workingman does enjoy freedom under the capitalist system. If the work does not suit him in one factory, he is free to seek work in another; he can change his employer. In a socialist community, where all the means of production are in a single hand, there is but one employer; to change is impossible.

In this respect the wage-earner today has a certain freedom in comparison with the worker in a socialist society, but this cannot be called a freedom of labor. However frequently a worker may change his place of work today, he will not find freedom. In each place the activities of every individual worker are defined and regulated. This has become a technical necessity.

Accordingly, the freedom with the loss of which the worker is threatened in a socialist society is not freedom of labor, but freedom to choose his master. Under the present system this freedom is of no slight importance; it is a protection to the workingman. But even this freedom is gradually destroyed by the progress of capitalism. The increasing number of the unemployed reduces constantly the number of positions that are open and throws upon the labor market more applicants than there are places. The idle workingman is, as a rule, happy if he can secure work of any sort. Furthermore, the increased concentration of the means of production in a few hands has a steady tendency to place over the workingman the same employer or set of employers whichever way he may turn. Inquiry, therefore, shows that what is decried as the wicked and tyrannical purpose of socialism is but the natural tendency of the economic development of modern society.

Socialism will not, and cannot, check this development; but in this as in so many other respects socialism can obviate the evils that accompany the development. It cannot remove the dependence of the working-man upon the mechanism of production in which he is one of the wheels; but it substitutes for the dependence of a working-man upon a capitalist with interests hostile to him a dependence upon a society of which he is himself a member, a society of equal comrades, all of whom have the same interests.

It can be easily understood why a liberal-minded lawyer or author may consider such a dependence unbearable, but it is not unbearable to the modern proletarian, as a glance at the trade union movement will show. The organizations of labor furnish a picture of the "tyranny of the socialist paternal state" of which the opponents of socialism have so much to say. In the organizations of labor the rules under which each member is to work are laid down minutely and enforced strictly. Yet it has never occurred to any member of such an organization that these rules were an unbearable restriction upon his personal liberty. Those who have found it incumbent upon them to defend the freedom of labor against this "terrorism," and who have done so often with force of arms and bloodshed, were never the working-men, but their exploiters. Poor Freedom! which has today no

defenders except slaveholders!

But in a socialist community the lack of freedom in work would not only lose its oppressive character, it would also become the foundation of the highest freedom yet possible to man. This seems a contradiction, but the contradiction is only apparent.

Down to the day when large production began, the labor employed in the production of the necessities of life took up the whole time of those engaged in it; it required the fullest exercise of both body and mind. This was true, not only of the fisherman and the hunter, but also of the farmer, the mechanic and the merchant. The existence of the human being engaged in production was consumed almost wholly by his occupation. It was labor that steeled his sinews and nerves, that quickened his brain and made him anxious to acquire knowledge. But the further division of labor was carried, the more one-sided did it make the producers. Mind and body ceased to exercise themselves in a variety of directions and to develop all their powers. Wholly taken up by incomplete momentary tasks, the producers lost the capacity to comprehend phenomena as organic wholes. A harmonious, well-rounded development of physical and mental powers, a deep concern in the problems of nature and society, a philosophical bent of mind, that is, a searching for the highest truth for its own sake – none of these could be found under such circumstances, except among those classes who remained free from the necessity of toil. Until the commencement of the era of machinery this was possible only by throwing upon others the burden of labor, by exploiting them. The most ideal, the most philosophic race that history has yet known, the only society of thinkers and artists devoted to science and art for their own sakes, was the Athenian aristocracy, the slave-holding landlords of Athens.

Among them all labor, whether slave or free, was regarded as degrading – and justly so. It was no presumption on the part of Socrates when he said: “Traders and mechanics lack culture. They have no leisure, and without leisure no good education is possible. They learn only what their trade requires of them; knowledge in itself has no attraction for them. They take up arithmetic only for the sake of trade, not for the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of numbers. It is not given to them to strive for higher things. The merchant and mechanic say: ‘The pleasure derived from honor and knowledge is of no value when compared with money-making.’ However skilled smiths, carpenters and shoemakers may be at their trade, most of them are animated only by the souls of slaves; they know not the true nor the beautiful.”

Economic development has advanced since those days. The division of labor has reached a point undreamt of, and the system of production for sale has driven many of the former exploiters and people of culture into the class of producers. Like the mechanics and farmers, the rich also are wholly taken up with their business. They do not now assemble in gymnasiums and academies, but in stock exchanges and markets. The speculations in which they are absorbed do not concern questions of truth and justice, but the prices of wool and whiskey, bonds and coupons. These are the speculations that consume their mental energies. After this “labor” they have neither strength nor taste for any but the most commonplace amusements.

On the other hand, as far as the cultured classes are concerned, their education has become a merchandise. They, too, have neither time nor inclination for disinterested search for truth, for striving after the ideal. Each buries himself in his specialty and considers every moment lost which is spent in learning anything which cannot be turned into money. Hence the movement to abolish Greek and Latin from the secondary schools. Whatever the pedagogic grounds may be for this movement, the real reason is the desire to have the youth taught only what is “useful,” that is, what can be turned into money. Even among scientific men and artists the instinct after a harmonious development is perceptibly losing ground. On all sides specialists are springing up. Science and art

are degraded to the level of a trade. What Socrates said of ancient handicraft now holds good of these pursuits. The philosophic way of looking at things is on the decline – that is, within the classes here considered.

In the meantime, a new sort of labor has sprung up – machine labor; and a new class – the proletariat.

The machine robs labor of all intellectual activity. The working-man at a machine no longer needs to think; all that he has to do is silently to obey the machine. The machine dictates to him what he has to do; he has become an appendage to it. What is said of hand labor applies also, though to a slighter extent, to homework and hand-work done in the factory. The division of labor in the production of a single article among innumerable working-men paves the way for the introduction of machinery.

The first result of the monotony and absence of intellectual activity in the work of the proletarian is the apparent dulling of his mind.

The second result is that he is driven to revolt against excessive hours of work. To him labor is not identical with life; life commences only when labor is at an end. For working-men to whom labor and life were identical, freedom of labor meant freedom of life. The workingman, who lives only when he does not work, can enjoy a free life only by being free from labor. As a matter of course, the efforts of this class of workers cannot be directed to freeing themselves from all labor. Labor is the condition of life. But their efforts will necessarily be directed toward reducing their hours of labor far enough to leave them time to live.

This is one of the principal causes of the struggle on the part of the modern proletariat to shorten the hours of work, a struggle which would have had no meaning to the farmers and mechanics of former social systems. The struggle of the proletariat for shorter hours is not aimed at economic advantages, such as a rise in wages or the reduction of the number of unemployed. The struggle for shorter hours is a struggle for life.

But the unintellectual character of machine work has a third result. The intellectual powers of the proletariat are not exhausted by their labor as are those of other workers; they lie fallow during work. For this reason the craving of the proletarian to exercise his mind outside of his hours of work is just so much the stronger. One of the most remarkable phenomena in modern society is the thirst for knowledge displayed by the proletariat. While all other classes kill their time with the most unintellectual diversions, the proletarian displays a passion for intellectual culture. Only one who has had an opportunity to associate with the proletariat can fully realize the strength of this thirst after knowledge and enlightenment. But even the outsider may imagine it, if he compares the newspapers, magazines and pamphlets of the workers with the literature that finds acceptance in other social circles.

And this thirst for knowledge is entirely disinterested. Knowledge cannot help the worker at a machine to increase his income. He seeks truth for its own sake, not for material profit. Accordingly, he does not limit himself to any one domain of knowledge; he tries to embrace the whole; he seeks to understand the whole of society, the whole world. The most difficult problems attract him most; it is often hard to bring him down from the clouds to solid earth.

It is not the possession of knowledge but the effort to acquire it that makes the philosopher. It is among the despised and ignorant proletariat that the philosophical spirit of the brilliant members of the Athenian aristocracy is revived. But the free development of this spirit is not possible in modern society. The proletariat is without means to instruct itself; it is deprived of opportunities for systematic study, it is exposed to all the dangers and inconveniences of planless self-instruction; above all, it lacks sufficient leisure. Science and art remain to the proletariat a promised land which

it looks at from a distance, which it struggles to possess, but which it cannot enter.

Only the triumph of Socialism can render accessible to the proletariat all the sources of culture. Only the triumph of socialism can make possible the reduction of the hours of work to such a point that the working-man can enjoy leisure enough to acquire adequate knowledge. The capitalist system of production wakens the proletarian's desire for knowledge; the socialist system alone can satisfy it.

It is not the freedom of labor, but the freedom from labor, which in a socialist society the use of machinery makes increasingly possible, that will bring to mankind freedom of life, freedom for artistic and intellectual activity, freedom for the noblest enjoyment.

That blessed, harmonious culture, which has only once appeared in the history of mankind and was then the privilege of a small body of select aristocrats, will become the common property of all civilized nations. What slaves were to the ancient Athenians, machinery will be to modern man. Man will feel all the elevating influences that flow from freedom from productive toil, without being poisoned by the evil influences which, through chattel slavery, finally undermined the Athenian aristocracy. And as the modern means of science and art are vastly superior to those of two thousand years ago, and the civilization of today overshadows that of the little land of Greece, so will the socialist commonwealth outshine in moral greatness and material well-being the most glorious society that history has thus far known.

Happy the man to whom it is given to contribute his strength to the realization of this ideal.

1.2 Karl Kautsky, Erfurt Program (1891)

The economic development of bourgeois society invariably leads to the ruin of small business, which is based on the private ownership by the worker of his means of production. It separates the worker from his means of production and turns him into a propertyless proletarian, while the means of production become the monopoly of a relatively small number of capitalists and large landowners.

Hand in hand with this monopolization of the means of production goes the displacement of these fractured small businesses by colossal large enterprises, the development of the tool into a machine, the gigantic growth in the productivity of human labor. But all the benefits of this transformation are monopolized by the capitalists and large landowners. For the proletariat and the sinking middle classes – petty bourgeoisie and farmers – it means an increase in the insecurity of their existence, of misery, of pressure, of oppression, of degradation, of exploitation.

Ever greater becomes the number of proletarians, ever more massive the army of excess workers, ever more stark the opposition between exploiters and the exploited, ever more bitter the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which divides modern society into two hostile camps and constitutes the common characteristic of all industrialized countries.

The gulf between the propertied and the propertyless is further widened by crises that are grounded in the nature of the capitalist mode of production, crises that are becoming more extensive and more devastating, that elevate this general uncertainty into the normal state of society and furnish proof that the powers of productivity have grown beyond society's control, that the private ownership of the means of production has become incompatible with their appropriate application and full development.

The private ownership of the means of production, once the means for securing for the producer the ownership of his product, has today become the means for expropriating farmers, artisans, and small merchants, and for putting the non-workers – capitalists, large landowners – into possession of the product of the workers. Only the transformation of the capitalist private ownership of the means

of production – land and soil, pits and mines, raw materials, tools, machines, means of transportation – into social property and the transformation of the production of goods into socialist production carried on by and for society can cause the large enterprise and the constantly growing productivity of social labor to change for the hitherto exploited classes from a source of misery and oppression into a source of the greatest welfare and universal, harmonious perfection.

This social transformation amounts to the emancipation not only of the proletariat, but of the entire human race, which is suffering from current conditions. But it can only be the work of the working class, because all other classes, notwithstanding the conflicts of interest between them, stand on the ground of the private ownership of the means of production and have as their common goal the preservation of the foundations of contemporary society.

The struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation is necessarily a political struggle. Without political rights, the working class cannot carry on its economic struggles and develop its economic organization. It cannot bring about the transfer of the means of production into the possession of the community without first having obtained political power.

It is the task of the Social Democratic Party to shape the struggle of the working class into a conscious and unified one and to point out the inherent necessity of its goals.

The interests of the working class are the same in all countries with a capitalist mode of production. With the expansion of global commerce, and of production for the world market, the position of the worker in every country becomes increasingly dependent on the position of workers in other countries. The emancipation of the working class is thus a task in which the workers of all civilized countries are equally involved. Recognizing this, the German Social Democratic Party feels and declares itself to be one with the class-conscious workers of all other countries.

The German Social Democratic Party therefore does not fight for new class privileges and class rights, but for the abolition of class rule and of classes themselves, for equal rights and equal obligations for all, without distinction of sex or birth. Starting from these views, it fights not only the exploitation and oppression of wage earners in society today, but every manner of exploitation and oppression, whether directed against a class, party, sex, or race.

Proceeding from these principles, the German Social Democratic Party demands, first of all:

1. Universal, equal, and direct suffrage with secret ballot in all elections, for all citizens of the Reich over the age of twenty, without distinction of sex. Proportional representation, and, until this is introduced, legal redistribution of electoral districts after every census. Two-year legislative periods. Holding of elections on a legal holiday. Compensation for elected representatives. Suspension of every restriction on political rights, except in the case of legal incapacity.

2. Direct legislation by the people through the rights of proposal and rejection. Self-determination and self-government of the people in Reich, state, province, and municipality. Election by the people of magistrates, who are answerable and liable to them. Annual voting of taxes.

3. Education of all to bear arms. Militia in the place of the standing army. Determination by the popular assembly on questions of war and peace. Settlement of all international disputes by arbitration.

4. Abolition of all laws that place women at a disadvantage compared with men in matters of public or private law.

5. Abolition of all laws that limit or suppress the free expression of opinion and restrict or suppress the right of association and assembly. Declaration that religion is a private matter. Abolition of all expenditures from public funds for ecclesiastical and religious purposes. Ecclesiastical and religious communities are to be regarded as private associations that regulate their affairs entirely autonomously.

6. Secularization of schools. Compulsory attendance at the public Volksschule [extended elementary school]. Free education, free educational materials, and free meals in the public Volksschulen, as well as at higher educational institutions for those boys and girls considered qualified for further education by virtue of their abilities.

7. Free administration of justice and free legal assistance. Administration of the law by judges elected by the people. Appeal in criminal cases. Compensation for individuals unjustly accused, imprisoned, or sentenced. Abolition of capital punishment.

8. Free medical care, including midwifery and medicines. Free burial.

9. Graduated income and property tax for defraying all public expenditures, to the extent that they are to be paid for by taxation. Inheritance tax, graduated according to the size of the inheritance and the degree of kinship. Abolition of all indirect taxes, customs, and other economic measures that sacrifice the interests of the community to those of a privileged few.

For the protection of the working classes, the German Social Democratic Party demands, first of all:

1. Effective national and international worker protection laws on the following principles:

(a) Fixing of a normal working day not to exceed eight hours.

(b) Prohibition of gainful employment for children under the age of fourteen.

(c) Prohibition of night work, except in those industries that require night work for inherent technical reasons or for reasons of public welfare.

(d) An uninterrupted rest period of at least thirty-six hours every week for every worker.

(e) Prohibition of the truck system.

2. Supervision of all industrial establishments, investigation and regulation of working conditions in the cities and the countryside by a Reich labor department, district labor bureaus, and chambers of labor. Rigorous industrial hygiene.

3. Legal equality of agricultural laborers and domestic servants with industrial workers; abolition of the laws governing domestics.

4. Safeguarding of the freedom of association.

5. Takeover by the Reich government of the entire system of workers' insurance, with decisive participation by the workers in its administration.

Week 2

Revisionism

Revisionism refers to a political and philosophical trend that deviates in significant ways from orthodox Marxism. Eduard Bernstein, the leading proponent of this tradition within the SPD, questioned a number of tenets sacred in orthodox Marxism, such as the necessity of revolution for the creation of a proletarian society, in *Evolutionary Socialism*.

The orthodox Marxists were not persuaded by what they regarded as Bernstein's heretical thinking. Rosa Luxemburg, a socialist intellectual newly arrived in Germany, excoriated Bernstein in her critique of revisionism, *Reform or Revolution*.

The Eley reading for this week is Chapter 4.

2.1 Eduard Bernstein, Evolutionary Socialism (1899)

Chapter III: The Tasks and Possibilities of Social Democracy

(a) The political and economic preliminary conditions of socialism

If we asked a number of men belonging to any class or party to give in a concise formula a definition of socialism, most of them would be somewhat confused. He who does not repeat at random some phrase he has heard must first make clear to himself whether he has to characterise a state, a movement, a perception, or an aim. If we consult the literature of socialism itself, we shall come across very various explanations of its concept according as they fall into one or other of the categories designated above from the derivation of the concept from juridical notions (equality, justice) or its summary characterisation as social science, up to its identification with the class struggle of the workers in modern society and the explanation that socialism means co-operative economics. In some cases conceptions founded on entirely different principles are the grounds for this variety of explanations; but they are mostly only the results of observing or representing one and the same thing from different points of view.

The most exact characterisation of socialism will in any case be that which starts from the concept of association because by it an economical as well as – in the widest sense of the word – a juridical relation is expressed at the same time. It needs no long-winded deduction to show that the indication of the juridical nature of socialism is just as important as that of its economic nature. Quite apart from the question whether or in what sense law is a primary or secondary factor in the life of a community, the nature of its law undoubtedly in each case gives the most concentrated

idea of its character. We characterise forms of communities, not according to their technological or economic foundations, but according to the fundamental principle of their legal institutions. We speak, indeed, of an age of stone, bronze, machinery, electricity, etc., but of a feudal, capitalistic, bourgeois, etc., order of society. To this would correspond the definition of socialism as a movement towards – or the state of – an order of society based on the principle of association. In this sense, which also corresponds with the etymology of the word (*socius* – a partner), the word is used in what follows.

Now what are the preliminary conditions of the realisation of socialism? Historical materialism sees them first in the modern development of production. With the spread of the capitalistic large enterprises in industry and agriculture there is assumed to be a lasting and steadily increasing material cause for the impetus to a socialistic transformation of society. In these undertakings production is already socially organised, only the management is individualistic and the profit is appropriated by individuals, not on the ground of their labour, but of their share of capital. The active worker is separated from the possession of his instruments of production, he is in the dependent condition of a wage-earner, from which he does not escape as long as he lives, and the pressure of it is rendered sharper by the uncertainty which is joined with this dependence both on the employer and on the fluctuations in the state of trade. Like production itself, the conditions of existence for the producers press towards the socialisation and the co-operative organisation of production and exchange. As soon as this development is sufficiently advanced the realisation of socialism becomes an imperative necessity for the further development of the community. To carry it out is the task of the proletariat organised as a class party which for this purpose must take possession of the political government.

According to that, we have as the first condition of the general realisation of socialism a definite degree of capitalist development, and as the second the exercise of political sovereignty by the class party of the workers, i.e., social democracy. The dictatorship of the proletariat is, according to Marx, the form of the exercise of this power in the transition period.

As regards the first condition, it has already been shown in the section on the “Classes of Establishments in Production and Distribution” that if the large undertaking in industry predominates to-day, yet it, including the businesses dependent on it, even in such an advanced country as Prussia, represents at the most only half the population engaged in production. The picture is not different if we take the statistics for the whole of Germany, and it is very little different in England, the most industrial country of Europe. In other foreign lands, perhaps with the exception of Belgium, the relation of the large enterprise to the small and medium business is still more unfavourable. But in agriculture we see everywhere the small and medium holding, as compared with the large one, not only greatly predominating, but also strengthening its position. In commerce and distribution the relation of the groups of undertakings is similar.

That the picture which the summarised figures of trade statistics give receives many corrections on a more recent examination of separate divisions, I have myself shown in my article on the *Catastrophic Theory*, after I had already expressly referred, in an earlier article of the series, *Problems of Socialism*, to the fact that the number of employees in an undertaking was no safe indication as to the degree of its capitalist nature.

But this is of no particularly great consequence for us at present. Whether of the hundreds of thousands of small undertakings, a good number are of capitalistic character and others are wholly or partly dependent on large capitalist undertakings, this can alter very little the total result which the statistics of undertakings offer. The great and growing variety of undertakings, the graduated character of the structure of industrial enterprises, is not thereby disproved. If we strike out of

the list a quarter or even a half of all small establishments as dependencies of medium and large enterprises, there remain in Germany almost a million undertakings from capitalist giant enterprises, downward in ever broadening classes to the hundred thousands of small enterprises worked in handicraft fashion, which may, indeed, pay tribute by-and-by to the process of concentration, but on that account show no indication of disappearing from the scene.

It follows that as far as centralised enterprise forms a preliminary condition for the socialisation of production and distribution, this is only a partial condition in even the most advanced countries of Europe, so that if in Germany in the near future the state wished to expropriate all undertakings, say of twenty persons and upwards, be it for state management altogether or for partly managing and partly leasing them, there would still remain in commerce and industry hundreds of thousands of undertakings with over four millions of workers which would be excluded and be carried on under private management. In agriculture there would remain, if all holdings of over 20 hectares were nationalised – of which no one dreams – several millions of holdings under private management with a total of 9,000,000 workers. One can form an idea of the magnitude of the task which would be borne by the state, or the states, by taking over even the larger undertakings. It would be a question, in industry and commerce together, of about a hundred thousand businesses with five to six million employees, and in agriculture of over 300,000 holdings with over five million workers. What abundance of judgment, practical knowledge, talent for administration, must a government or a national assembly have at its disposal to be even equal to the supreme management or managing control of such a gigantic organism!

But let us leave this question on one side for a time, and let us keep first of all firmly to the fact that the material preliminary condition for the socialisation of production and distribution – advanced centralisation of enterprises – is at present only partly achieved.

The second preliminary condition, according to the theory of Marx, is the conquest of the political power by the proletariat. One can think of this conquest in various ways: by the path of parliamentary struggle, turning the right to vote to good account, or by the path of force by means of a revolution.

It is known that Marx and Engels, until pretty recently, considered the latter as nearly everywhere absolutely inevitable, and it seems unavoidable to various adherents of the Marxist doctrine to-day. Often it is also considered the shorter way.

To this, people are led before all else by the idea that the working class is the most numerous and also the most energetic class of the community. Once in possession of power, it would not rest until it had substituted for the foundations of the present system such arrangements as would make its restoration impossible.

It has already been mentioned that Marx and Engels, in the establishment of their the epoch of theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, had before their eyes as a typical example terror of the French Revolution. Even in *Anti-Dühring* Engels declares that St. Simon in 1792, by regarding the reign of terror as the reign of the masses without means, made a discovery worthy of a genius. That is probably an over-estimation, but however highly one may esteem the discovery, the result of the rule of the men without property does not thrive much better with St. Simon than with Schiller, decried to-day as “a philistine”. The men without property in 1793 were only capable of fighting the battles of others. They could only “govern” as long as the terror lasted. When itself, as it was bound to do, it had exhausted their government was quite at an end. According to the Marx-Engels point of view, this danger would not exist with the modern proletariat. But what is the modern proletariat?

If one counts in it all persons without property, all those who have no income from property

or from a privileged position, then they certainly form the absolute majority of the population of advanced countries. But this “proletariat” would be a mixture of extraordinarily different elements, of classes which have more differences among themselves than had the “people” of 1789, who certainly as long as the present conditions of property are maintained have more common – or, at least, similar – interests than contrary ones; but the different nature of their needs and interests would quickly become known to them as soon as the propertied and governing classes are removed from, or deprived of, their position.

On an earlier occasion I made the remark that the modern wage-earners are not of the homogeneous mass, devoid in an equal degree of property, family, etc., as the *Communist Manifesto* foresees; that it is just in the most advanced of the manufacturing industries that a whole hierarchy of differentiated workmen are to be found between whose groups only a moderate feeling of solidarity exists. In this remark, a well-known socialist writer, H. Cunow, sees a confirmation of the fact that even when I was speaking, generally I had in my mind specially English conditions. In Germany and the other continental civilised lands he says no such separation from the revolutionary movement of the workmen in better positions is to be found as in England. In contrast to England the best-paid workmen stand at the head of the class war. The English caste feeling, he adds, is not a consequence of the social differentiation of to-day but an after-effect of the earlier system of guilds and companies and the older trade union movement based on them.

Again I must reply that what my opponent tells me is in no way new to me. If a certain guild-like feature is to be found in the English working-class movement, it is far less a heritage from the old guild system, which, indeed, existed much longer in Germany than in England, than one of the chief products of Anglo-Saxon freedom – of the fact that the English workman never, not even at the time of the suppression of the right of association, stood under the scourge of a state ruled by police. The sense of individuality is developed in freedom, or, to speak for once with Stirner, the sense of own. It does not exclude the recognition of what is of a different nature and of general interest, but it easily becomes the cause of a little angularity which even appears as hard and narrow-minded when it is only one-sided in form. I do not want to wrong the German workmen, and I know how fully to honour the idealism which, for example, moved the Hamburg workmen for decades to sacrifices for the common cause of the proletarian struggle for freedom which have not their equal in the working-class movement; but so far as I have opportunity of knowing and following the German working-class movement, the reactions of the trade differentiation described have asserted themselves. Special circumstances, such as the preponderance of the political movement, the long artificial suppression of trade unions, and the fact that on the whole the differences in rates of wages and hours of labour are generally less in Germany than in England, prevent their manifesting themselves in a peculiarly striking manner. But any one who follows attentively the organs of the German trade union movement will come across enough facts to confirm what I have said.

The trade unions do not create that phenomenon, they only bring it into prominence as an unavoidable result of actual differences. It cannot be otherwise than that vital differences in manner of work and amount of income finally produce different conduct and demands of life. The highly-skilled fine instrument-maker and the collier, the skilled house decorator and the porter, the sculptor or modeller and the stoker, lead, as a rule, a very different kind of life and have very different kinds of wants. Where the struggles for their standards of life lead to no collision between them, the fact that they are all wage-earners may efface these differences from their ideas, and the consciousness that they are carrying on the same kind of struggle against capital may produce a lively, mutual sympathy. Such sympathy is not wanting in England; the most aristocratic of aristocratic trade unionists have often enough shown it to workmen in worse conditions, as many of them are very good

democrats in politics, if they are not socialists. But there is a great difference between such political or social political sympathy and economic solidarity which a stronger political and economic pressure may neutralise, but which, according as this pressure diminishes, will make itself finally noticeable in one way or another. It is a great mistake to assume that England makes an exception here on principle. The same phenomenon is shown in France in another form. Similarly in Switzerland, the United States, and, as I have said, to a certain degree in Germany also.

But even if we assume that this differentiation does not exist in the industrial working classes or that it exercises no effect on the mode of thinking of the workmen concerned, yet the industrial workers are everywhere the minority of the population. In Germany, together with industrial home-workers, some 7,000,000 out of 19,000,000 people earning incomes are industrial wage-earners. We have besides the technical civil service, the shop employees, the agricultural labourers.

Here the differentiation is everywhere more marked, of which no clearer evidence is given than the painful history of the movements towards the organisation of these classes of labour in industrial unions like trade unions. It is quite impossible to say that the five or six millions employed in agriculture (which the German trade statistics register after deducting the higher staff of assistants, stewards, etc.) will strive to better themselves with the same force as the industrial workers.

Only with quite a small number can one propose or expect serious inclination for, and understanding of, endeavours which go beyond the mere amelioration of conditions of labour. To by far the greatest number of them the socialisation of agricultural production cannot be much more than empty words. Their ideal is in the meantime to get their own land.

Meanwhile, the desire of the industrial working classes for socialistic production is for the most part more a matter of assumption than of certainty. From the growth of the number of socialist votes in public elections one can certainly deduce a steady increase of adherents of socialistic strivings, but no one would maintain that all votes given to socialists come from socialists. Even if we assumed that all these voters would greet with joy a revolution which brought the socialists to the helm, little would even then be done towards the solution of the main problem.

I think I can take it as being generally admitted that there would be no question of an immediate taking over by the state of the total manufacture and distribution of products. The state could not even take over the whole amount of medium and large enterprises. The local authorities, too, as connecting links, could not do so very much. They could socialise at most those businesses which produce, or which perform services, locally for that locality, and they would get therewith quite a nice little task. But can one imagine that undertakings which until then had worked for the great outside market could be suddenly municipalised?

Let us take an industrial town of only medium size, say Augsburg, Barmen, Dortmund, Hanau, Mannheim. Is anyone so foolish as to imagine that the communes there could, in a political crisis or at some other occasion, take over all the different manufacturing and commercial businesses of these places into their own management and carry them on with success? They would either have to leave them in the hands of the former proprietors, or, if they wanted to expropriate these absolutely, they would be obliged to give them over to associations of workmen on some leasing conditions.

The question in all these cases would resolve itself into the question of the economic power of associations – i.e., of co-operation.

(b) The Economic Capacities of Co-operative Associations

The question of the capabilities of associations has hitherto been treated very curiously in the Marxist literature. If one leaves out of the question the literature of the 'sixties, one will find in it,

with the exception of very general, mostly negative, observations, very little about the co-operative movement. The reasons for this negligence are not far to seek.

First, the Marxist practice is predominantly political, and is directed towards the conquest of political power and attributes, and gives importance almost solely to the trade union movement, as a direct form of the class struggle of the workers. But with respect to the co-operative societies, the conviction was forced on Marx that on a small scale it was fruitless, and would, moreover, have at the most only a very limited experimental value. Only through the community could something be begun. Marx expresses himself in this sense on the associations of workmen in the *18 Brumaire*.

Later he somewhat modifies his judgment of co-operative societies to which the resolutions on the system of co-operation moved by the General Council of the International at the Congress at Geneva and Lausanne bear witness, as well as the passage apparently originating from Marx, at all events approved by him in G. Eccarius' *A Workman's Refutation of John Stuart Mill*, where the same significance is applied to the associations as forerunners of the future, as the guilds had held in Rome and the early middle ages, and, further, the passage already alluded to in the third volume of *Capital*, which, written at the same time as those resolutions and Eccarius' work, brings into prominence the importance of industrial associations of the workers as a transition form to socialist production. But the letter on the draft scheme of the *Gotha Programme* (1875) again sounds much more sceptical as regards these associations, and this scepticism reigns from the middle of the 'seventies over the whole Marxist literature.

This may partly be the result of the reaction which set in after the Paris Commune, and which gave the whole working-class movement another character almost exclusively directed towards politics. But it is also the result of the sad experiences which had been undergone everywhere with co-operative societies. The high-flown expectations to which the advance of the English co-operative movement had given occasion were not fulfilled. For all socialists of the 'sixties, societies for production had been the chief consideration, the co-operative stores were minor. The opinion prevailed – to which even Engels in his essays on the housing question gave expression – that as soon as co-operative stores everywhere included the mass of the workers they would certainly have as a consequence a reduction of wages. The resolution drawn up by Marx for the Geneva Congress runs:

We recommend workmen to embark on co-operative production rather than on cooperative stores. The latter touch only the surface of the economic system of to-day, the first strikes at its foundations ... To stop the co-operative societies from degenerating into ordinary bourgeois companies all workers employed by them, whether shareholders or not, should receive the same share. As a merely temporary expedient it may be agreed that the shareholders should besides receive a moderate interest.

But it was just the productive societies formed in the 'sixties which failed nearly everywhere. They had either been obliged to dissolve altogether or had dwindled into small company businesses, which, if they did not employ men for wages quite in the same way as other businesses, were weakly dying away. On the other side the societies of consumers were, or appeared to be, really turned into mere "philistine" retail shops. No wonder that people in socialist circles turned their backs more and more on the whole co-operative movement.

Two circumstances are answerable for the fact that a comprehensive criticism on cooperation is wanting in Marx. First, at the time he wrote sufficient experience of the different forms of co-operation was wanting to formulate a judgment on that basis. The exchange bazaars which belonged to an earlier period had proved absolute failures. But, secondly, Marx did not meet the co-operative

societies with that freedom from preconception which would have allowed his faculty for keen observation to penetrate further than the average socialist's. Here the already formed doctrine – or, if I may be allowed the expression, the formula – of expropriation stood in the way of his great power of analysis. The co-operative society was acceptable to him in that form in which it represented the most direct contrast to the capitalist undertaking. Hence the recommendation to workmen to take up cooperative societies for production because these attacked the existing economic system “at its foundation.” That is quite in the spirit of dialectics and corresponds formally throughout with the theory of society which starts from production as, in the last instance, the decisive factor of the form of society. It corresponds also, apparently, with the conception which perceives in the antagonism between already socialised labour and private appropriation the fundamental contradiction in the modern mode of production which is pressing for a solution. Productive co-operation appears as the practical solution of this antagonism. In this sense Marx thinks of it – that is, that kind of society where the “workers as an association are their own capitalist”, so that, if it necessarily reproduced all the faults of the present system, yet it did away in fact with the antagonism between capital and labour and thus proved the superfluosity of the capitalist employer. Yet experience has since taught that industrial co-operation constituted in just that kind of way was not, and is not, in a position to produce this proof; that it is the most unfortunate form of associated labour; and that Proudhon was actually in the right when, in regard to it, he maintained against Louis Blanc that the associations were “no economic force.”

The social democratic critic has sought hitherto the causes of the economic failure of the purely productive co-operative societies simply in their want of capital, credit, and sale, and has explained the decay of the associations that have not failed economically by the corrupting influence of the capitalistic or individualistic world surrounding them. All that is to the point as far as it goes. But it does not exhaust the question. Of quite a series of productive associations that have failed financially, it is quite certain that they had sufficient capital for their work and no greater difficulties in selling than the average manufacturer. If the productive association of the kind depicted had been a force superior to the capitalistic undertaking or even of the same economic power, then it should at least have continued and risen in the same ratio as the many private enterprises begun with most modest means, and it would not have succumbed so pitifully to the “moral” influence of the capitalist world surrounding it, as it has done continually again and again. The history of the productive co-operative societies that have not failed financially speaks almost more loudly still against this form of “republican factory” than that of the bankrupt ones. For it says that, regarding the first, the further development means exclusiveness and privilege. Far from attacking the foundation of the present economic system they have much more given a proof of its relative strength.

On the other hand, the co-operative stores on which the socialists of the 'sixties looked so disparagingly, in the course of time have really proved to be an economic power – i.e., as an organism fit to perform its work and capable of a high degree of development. Against the pitiable figures which the statistics of the purely productive co-operative societies offer, the figures of workmen's co-operative stores show up like the budget of a world-embracing empire to that of a little country town. And the workshops erected and conducted on account of such co-operative stores have already produced many times the amount of goods which have been made by purely, or nearly purely, productive co-operative societies.

The deeper reasons for the economic as well as the moral failures of purely productive associations have been excellently presented by Mrs. Beatrice Webb in her work on the British Co-operative Movement, even if here and there, perhaps, a few exaggerations are found. For Mrs. Webb, as for the

great majority of English co-operators, the society belonging to the workmen engaged in it is not socialistic or democratic but “individualistic”. One can take offence at the selection of this word, but the line of thought is quite correct. This association is not socialistic, as Robertus, indeed, has already shown. When the workmen employed are the exclusive proprietors, its constitution is a living contradiction in itself. It supposes equality in the workshop, a complete democracy, a republic. But as soon as it has attained a certain size – which may be relatively very modest – equality breaks down because differentiation of functions is necessary, and with it subordination. If equality is given up, the corner-stone of the building is removed, and the other stones follow in the course of time, and decay and conversion into ordinary business concerns step in. But if equality is maintained, then the possibility of extension is cut off and it remains of the small kind. That is the alternative for all purely productive associations. In this conflict they have all broken down or languished. Far from being a suitable form for removing the capitalist from the field of modern large industries they are much more a return to pre-capitalist production. That is so very much the case that the few instances where they have had relative success occurred in artisan trades, the majority of them not in England, where the spirit of large industries dominates the workers, but in strongly “small bourgeois” France. Psychologists of nations like to set England up as the land where the people seek equality in freedom, France as the land where they seek freedom in equality. The history of the French productive associations includes, indeed, many pages where the greatest sacrifices were undergone with touching devotion for the maintenance of formal equality. But it shows not one purely productive association of the modern large industry type, although the latter is nevertheless fairly widely spread in France.

...

[I]t is quite a mistake to believe that the modern factory produces in itself a considerable disposition for associated work. And likewise the republic in the workshop becomes a more difficult problem as the undertaking becomes greater and more complicated. For exceptional objects it may answer for men themselves to name their immediate leaders and to have the right to remove them. But for the tasks which the management of a great factory brings with it, where day by day and hour by hour prosaic decisions are to be taken which always give an opportunity for friction, it is simply impossible that the manager should be the employee of those he manages, that he should be dependent for his position on their favour and their bad temper. It has always proved impossible to continue this, and in all cases it has led to a change in the forms of the associated factory. The desire of the workers to take in hand new undertakings where they are employed as an associated manufactory and are bearing corresponding responsibilities and risks, stands in an inverse ratio to the size of their undertaking. But the difficulties grow at an increasing rate.

Let any one only for once look at the thing in the concrete and examine any large industrial undertaking, a great establishment for building machines, large electricity works, a great chemical factory, or a modern publishing business. All these and similar large industrial undertakings can certainly be quite well carried on by co-operative associations, to which also all the employees may belong, but they are absolutely unfit for the associated management of the employees themselves. It would then be shown, in the clearest way possible, what Cunow contends – viz., that the feeling of solidarity between groups of workers, different as to degree of education, manner of life, etc., is only very moderate in amount. What one usually understands by associated labour is only a mistaken rendering of the very simple forms of co-operative work as they are practised by groups, gangs, etc of undifferentiated workers, and which, at the bottom, is only piece-work by groups.

What the community itself cannot take in hand, whether by the state, the district, or the municipality, it would do very well, especially in stormy times, to leave alone for the time being.

The apparently more radical action would very soon prove to be the most inexpedient. Co-operative associations capable of living do not allow themselves to be produced by magic or to be set up by order; they must grow up. But they grow up where the soil is prepared for them.

(c) Democracy and Socialism

On February 24th, 1848, broke the first dawn of a new period of history. Who speaks of universal suffrage utters a cry of reconciliation. – Lassalle, *Workers' Programme*

...

The trade unions are the democratic element in industry. Their tendency is to destroy the absolutism of capital, and to procure for the worker a direct influence in the management of an industry. It is only natural that great differences of opinion should exist on the degree of influence to be desired. To a certain mode of thought it may appear a breach of principle to claim less for the union than an unconditional right of decision in the trade. The knowledge that such a right under present circumstances is just as Utopian as it would be contrary to the nature of a socialist community, has led others to deny trade unions any lasting part in economic life, and to recognise them only temporarily as the lesser of various unavoidable evils. There are socialists in whose eyes the union is only an object lesson to prove the uselessness of any other than political revolutionary action. As a matter of fact, the union to-day – and in the near future – has very important social tasks to fulfil for the trades, which, however, do not demand, nor are even consistent with, its omnipotence in any way.

The merit of having first grasped the fact that trade unions are indispensable organs of the democracy, and not only passing coalitions, belongs to a group of English writers. This is not wonderful if one considers that trade unions attained importance in England earlier than anywhere else, and that England in the last third of the nineteenth century passed through a change from an oligarchic to an almost democratic state of government. The latest and most thorough work on this subject, the book on the theory and the practice of the British Trade Unions, by Sydney and Beatrice Webb, has been rightly described by the authors as a treatment of *Industrial Democracy*. Before them the late Thorold Rogers, in his lectures on the *Economic Interpretation of History* (which, in the passing, has little in common with the materialist conception of history, but only touches it in single points), called the trade union, Labour Partnership – which comes to the same thing in principle, but at the same time points out the limits to which the function of a trade union can extend in a democracy, and beyond which it has no place in a democratic community. Independently of whether the state, the community, or capitalists are employers, the trade union as an organisation of all persons occupied in certain trades can only further simultaneously the interests of its members and the general good as long as it is content to remain a partner. Beyond that it would run into danger of degenerating into a close corporation with all the worst qualities of a monopoly. It is the same as with the co-operative society. The trade union, as mistress of a whole branch of production, the ideal of various older socialists, would really be only a monopolist productive association, and as soon as it relied on its monopoly or worked upon it, it would be antagonistic to socialism and democracy, let its inner constitution be what it may. Why it is contrary to socialism needs no further explanation. Associations against the community are as little socialism as is the oligarchic government of the state. But why should such a trade union not be in keeping with the principles of a democracy?

This question necessitates another. What is the principle of democracy?

The answer to this appears very simple. At first one would think it settled by the definition "government by the people." But even a little consideration tells us that by that only quite a superficial, purely formal definition is given, whilst nearly all who use the word democracy to-day understand by it more than a mere form of government. We shall come much nearer to the definition if we express ourselves negatively, and define democracy as an absence of class government, as the indication of a social condition where a political privilege belongs to no one class as opposed to the whole community. By that the explanation is already given as to why a monopolist corporation is in principle anti-democratic. This negative definition has, besides, the advantage that it gives less room than the phrase "government by the people" to the idea of the oppression of the individual by the majority which is absolutely repugnant to the modern mind. To-day we find the oppression of the minority by the majority "undemocratic," although it was originally held to be quite consistent with government by the people. The idea of democracy includes, in the conception of the present day, a notion of justice – an equality of rights for all members of the community, and in that principle the rule of the majority, to which in every concrete case the rule of the people extends, finds its limits. The more it is adopted and governs the general consciousness, the more will democracy be equal in meaning to the highest possible degree of freedom for all.

Democracy is in principle the suppression of class government, though it is not yet the actual suppression of classes. They speak of the conservative character of the democracy, and to a certain degree rightly. Absolutism, or semi-absolutism, deceives its supporters as well as its opponents as to the extent of their power. Therefore in countries where it obtains, or where its traditions still exist, we have flitting plans, exaggerated language, zigzag politics, fear of revolution, hope in oppression. In a democracy the parties, and the classes standing behind them, soon learn to know the limits of their power, and to undertake each time only as much as they can reasonably hope to carry through under the existing circumstances. Even if they make their demands rather higher than they seriously mean in order to give way in the unavoidable compromise – and democracy is the high school of compromise – they must still be moderate. The right to vote in a democracy makes its members virtually partners in the community, and this virtual partnership must in the end lead to real partnership. With a working class undeveloped in numbers and culture the general right to vote may long appear as the right to choose "the butcher"; with the growing number and knowledge of the workers it is changed, however, into the implement by which to transform the representatives of the people from masters into real servants of the people.

Universal suffrage in Germany could serve Bismarck temporarily as a tool, but finally it compelled Bismarck to serve it as a tool. It could be of use for a time to the squires of the East Elbe district, but it has long been the terror of these same squires. In 1878 it could bring Bismarck into a position to forge the weapon of socialistic law, but through it this weapon became blunt and broken, until by the help of it Bismarck was thoroughly beaten. Had Bismarck in 1878, with his then majority, created a politically exceptional law, instead of a police one, a law which would have placed the worker outside the franchise, he would for a time have hit social democracy more sharply than with the former. It is true, he would then have hit other people also. Universal franchise is, from two sides, the alternative to a violent revolution. But universal suffrage is only a part of democracy, although a part which in time must draw the other parts after it as the magnet attracts to itself the scattered portions of iron. It certainly proceeds more slowly than many would wish, but in spite of that it is at work. And social democracy cannot further this work better than by taking its stand unreservedly on the theory of democracy – on the ground of universal suffrage with all the consequences resulting therefrom to its tactics.

In practice – that is, in its actions – it has in Germany always done so. But in their explanations

its literary advocates have often acted otherwise, and still often do so to-day. Phrases which were composed in a time when the political privilege of property ruled all over Europe, and which under these circumstances were explanatory, and to a certain degree also justified, but which to-day are only a dead weight, are treated with such reverence as though the progress of the movement depended on them and not on the understanding of what can be done, and what should be done. Is there any sense, for examples in maintaining the phrase of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” at a time when in all possible places representatives of social democracy have placed themselves practically in the arena of Parliamentary work, have declared for the proportional representation of the people, and for direct legislation – all of which is inconsistent with a dictatorship.

The phrase is to-day so antiquated that it is only to be reconciled with reality by stripping the word dictatorship of its actual meaning and attaching to it some kind of weakened interpretation. The whole practical activity of social democracy is directed towards creating circumstances and conditions which shall render possible and secure a transition (free from convulsive outbursts) of the modern social order into a higher one. From the consciousness of being the pioneers of a higher civilisation, its adherents are ever creating fresh inspiration and zeal. In this rests also, finally, the moral justification of the socialist expropriation towards which they aspire. But the “dictatorship of the classes” belongs to a lower civilisation, and apart from the question of the expediency and practicability of the thing, it is only to be looked upon as a reversion, as political atavism. If the thought is aroused that the transition from a capitalist to a socialist society must necessarily be accomplished by means of the development of forms of an age which did not know at all, or only in quite an imperfect form, the present methods of the initiating and carrying of laws, and which was without the organs fit for the purpose, reaction will set in.

I say expressly transition from a capitalist to a socialist society, and not from a “civic society,” as is so frequently the expression used to-day. This application of the word “civic” is also much more an atavism, or in any case an ambiguous way of speaking, which must be considered an inconvenience in the phraseology of German social democracy, and which forms an excellent bridge for mistakes with friend and foe. The fault lies partly in the German language, which has no special word for the idea of the citizen with equal civic rights separate from the idea of privileged citizens.

...

Finally, it is to be recommended that some moderation should be kept in the declaration of war against “liberalism.” It is true that the great liberal movement of modern times arose for the advantage of the capitalist bourgeoisie first of all, and the parties which assumed the names of liberals were, or became in due course, simple guardians of capitalism. Naturally, only opposition can reign between these parties and social democracy. But with respect to liberalism as a great historical movement, socialism is its legitimate heir, not only in chronological sequence, but also in its spiritual qualities, as is shown moreover in every question of principle in which social democracy has had to take up an attitude.

Wherever an economic advance of the socialist programme had to be carried out in a manner, or under circumstances, that appeared seriously to imperil the development of freedom, social democracy has never shunned taking up a position against it. The security of civil freedom has always seemed to it to stand higher than the fulfilment of some economic progress.

The aim of all socialist measures, even of those which appear outwardly as coercive measures, is the development and the securing of a free personality. Their more exact examination always shows that the coercion included will raise the sum total of liberty in society, and will give more freedom over a more extended area than it takes away. The legal day of a maximum number of hours’ work, for example, is actually a fixing of a minimum of freedom, a prohibition to sell freedom longer

than for a certain number of hours daily, and, in principle, therefore, stands on the same ground as the prohibition agreed to by all liberals against selling oneself into personal slavery. It is thus no accident that the first country where a maximum hours' day was carried out was Switzerland, the most democratically progressive country in Europe, and democracy is only the political form of liberalism. Being in its origin a counter-movement to the oppression of nations under institutions imposed from without or having a justification only in tradition, liberalism first sought its realisation as the principle of the sovereignty of the age and of the people, both of which principles formed the everlasting discussion of the philosophers of the rights of the state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, until Rousseau set them up in his *Contrat Social* as the fundamental conditions of the legitimacy of every constitution, and the French Revolution proclaimed them – in the Democratic Constitution of 1793 permeated with Rousseau's spirit – as inalienable rights of men.

The Constitution of 1793 was the logical expression of the liberal ideas of the epoch, and a cursory glance over its contents shows how little it was, or is, an obstacle to socialism. Baboeuf, and the believers in absolute equality, saw in it an excellent starting point for the realisation of their communistic strivings, and accordingly wrote "The Restoration of the Constitution of 1793" at the head of their demands.

There is actually no really liberal thought which does not also belong to the elements of the ideas of socialism. Even the principle of economic personal responsibility which belongs apparently so entirely to the Manchester School cannot, in my judgment, be denied in theory by socialism nor be made inoperative under any conceivable circumstances. Without responsibility there is no freedom; we may think as we like theoretically, about man's freedom of action, we must practically start from it as the foundation of the moral law, for only under this condition is social morality possible. And similarly, in our states which reckon with millions, a healthy social life is, in the age of traffic, impossible if the economic personal responsibility of all those capable of work is not assumed. The recognition of individual responsibility is the return of the individual to society for services rendered or offered him by society.

...

Socialism will create no new bondage of any kind whatever. The individual is to be free, not in the metaphysical sense, as the anarchists dreamed – i.e., free from all duties towards the community – but free from every economic compulsion in his action and choice of a calling. Such freedom is only possible for all by means of organisation. In this sense one might call socialism "organising liberalism," for when one examines more closely the organisations that socialism wants and how it wants them, he will find that what distinguishes them above all from the feudalistic organisations, outwardly like them, is just their liberalism, their democratic constitution, their accessibility. Therefore the trade union, striving after an arrangement similar to a guild, is, in the eyes of the socialist, the product of self-defence against the tendency of capitalism to overstock the labour market; but, at the same time, just on account of its tendency towards a guild, and to the degree in which that obtains, is it an unsocialistic corporate body.

The work here indicated is no very simple problem; it rather conceals within itself a whole series of dangers. Political equality alone has never hitherto sufficed to secure the healthy development of communities whose centre of gravity was in the giant towns. It is, as France and the United States show, no unfailing remedy against the rank growth of all kinds of social parasitism and corruption. If solidity did not reach so far down in the constitution of the French nation, and if the country were not so well favoured geographically, France would have long since been ruined by the land plague of the official class which has gained a footing there. In any case this plague forms one of the causes why, in spite of the great keenness of the French mind, the industrial development of France remains

more backward than that of the neighbouring countries. If democracy is not to excel centralised absolutism in the breeding of bureaucracies, it must be built up on an elaborately organised self-government with a corresponding economic, personal responsibility of all the units of administration as well as of the adult citizens of the state. Nothing is more injurious to its healthy development than enforced uniformity and a too abundant amount of protectionism or subventionism.

To create the organisations described – or, so far as they are already begun, to develop them further – is the indispensable preliminary to what we call socialism of production. Without them the so-called social appropriation of the means of production would only result presumably in reckless devastation of productive forces, insane experimentalising and aimless violence, and the political sovereignty of the working class would, in fact, only be carried out in the form of a dictatorial, revolutionary, central power, supported by the terrorist dictatorship of revolutionary clubs. As such it hovered before the Blanquists, and as such it is still represented in the *Communist Manifesto* and in the publications for which its authors were responsible at that time. But “in presence of the practical experiences of the February revolution and much more of those of the Paris Commune when the proletariat retained political power for two months,” the revolutionary programme given in the *Manifesto* has “here and there become out of date”. “The Commune notably offers a proof that the working class cannot simply take possession of the state machinery and set it in motion for their own ends.”

So wrote Marx and Engels in 1872 in the preface to the new edition of the *Manifesto*. And they refer to the work, *The Civil War in France*, where this is developed more fully. But if we open the work in question and read the part referred to (it is the third), we find a programme developed which, according to its political contents, shows in all material features the greatest similarity to the federalism of Proudhon.

The unity of the nation was not to be broken, but on the contrary it was to be organised by the destruction of that power of the state which pretended to be the personification of that unity but wanted to be independent of, and superior to, the nation on whose body it was after all only a parasitic growth. Whilst they were occupied in cutting off the merely oppressive organs of the old governing power its rightful functions as a power which claimed to stand above the community were to be taken away and given over to the responsible servants of the community. Instead of deciding once in three or six years what member of the ruling class should trample on and crush the people in Parliament, universal suffrage should serve the people constituted in communities, as individual suffrage serves every other employer to select for his business workers, inspectors, and clerks.

The antagonism between the commune and the power of the state has been looked on as an exaggerated form of the old fight against over-centralisation ... The constitution of the commune, on the contrary, would have restored to the community all the powers which until now the parasitic growth, the state, which lives on the community and hinders its free action, has absorbed.

Thus Marx wrote in the *Civil War in France*.

Let us now listen to Proudhon. As I have not his work on Federalism at hand, a few sentences may follow here from his essay on the *Political Capacity of the Working Classes* in which he incidentally preaches the forming of the workers into a party of their own.

In a democracy organised according to the true ideas of the sovereignty of the people, i.e., according to the fundamental principles of the right of representation, every oppressive

and corrupting action of the central authority on the nation is rendered impossible. The mere supposition of such a thing is absurd.

And why?

Because in a truly free democracy the central authority is not separated from the assembly of delegates, the natural organs of local interests called together for agreement. Because every deputy is, first of all, the man of the locality which named him its representative, its emissary, one of its fellow-citizens, its special agent to defend its special interests, or to bring them as much as possible into union with the interests of the whole community before the great jury (the nation); because the combined delegates, if they choose from their midst a central executive committee of management, do not separate it from themselves or make it their commander who can carry on a conflict with them.

...

There is not the least doubt (and it has since then been proved many times practically) that the general development of modern society is along the line of a constant increase of the duties of municipalities and the extension of municipal freedom, that the municipality will be an ever more important lever of social emancipation. It appears to one doubtful if it was necessary for the first work of democracy to be such a dissolution of the modern state system and complete transformation of its organisation as Marx and Proudhon pictured (the formation of the national assembly out of delegates from provincial or district assemblies, which in their turn were composed of delegates from municipalities) so that the form the national assemblies had hitherto taken had to be abolished. Evolution has given life to too many institutions and bodies corporate, whose sphere has outgrown the control of municipalities and even of provinces and districts for it to be able to do without the control of the central governments unless or before their organisation is transformed. The absolute sovereignty of the municipality, etc., is besides no ideal for me. The parish or commune is a component part of the nation, and hence has duties towards it and rights in it. We can as little grant the district, for example, an unconditional and exclusive right to the soil as we can to the individual. Valuable royalties, rights of forest and river, etc., belong, in the last instance, not to the parishes or the districts, which indeed only are their usufructuaries, but to the nation. Hence an assembly in which the national, and not the provincial or local, interest stands in the forefront or is the first duty of the representatives, appears to be indispensable, especially in an epoch of transition. But beside it, those other assemblies and representative bodies will attain an ever greater importance, so that Revolution or not, the functions of the central assemblies become constantly narrowed, and therewith the danger of these assemblies or authorities to the democracy is also narrowed. It is already very little in advanced countries to-day.

But we are less concerned here with a criticism of separate items in the quoted programme than with bringing into prominence the energy with which it emphasises autonomy the preliminary condition of social emancipation, and with showing how the democratic organisation from the bottom upwards is depicted as the way to the realisation of socialism, and how the antagonists Proudhon and Marx meet again in – liberalism.

The future municipalities itself will reveal how far the and other self-governing bodies will discharge their duties under a complete democracy, and how far they will make use of these duties. But so much is clear: the more suddenly they come in possession of their freedom, the more experiments they will make in number and in violence and therefore be liable to greater mistakes, and the more experience the working class democracy has had in the school of self-government, the more cautiously and practically will it proceed.

Simple as democracy appears to be at the first glance, its problems in such a complicated society as ours are in no way easy to solve. Read only in the volumes of *Industrial Democracy* by Mr. and Mrs. Webb how many experiments the English trade unions had to make and are still making in order to find out the most serviceable forms of government and administration, and of what importance this question of constitution is to trade unions. The English trade unions have been able to develop in this respect for over seventy years in perfect freedom. They began with the most elementary form of self-government and have been forced to convince themselves that this form is only suited to the most elementary organisms, for quite small, local unions. As they grew they gradually learned to renounce as injurious to their successful development certain cherished ideas of doctrinaire democracy (the imperative mandate, the unpaid official, the powerless central representation), and to form instead of it a democracy capable of governing with representative assemblies, paid officials, and central government with full powers. This section of the history of the development of "trade union democracy" is extremely instructive. If all that concerns trade unions does not quite fit the units of national administration, yet much of it does. The chapter referred to in *Industrial Democracy* belongs to the theory of democratic government. In the history of the development of trade unions is shown how the executive central management – their state government – can arise simply from division of labour which becomes necessary through the extension in area of the society and through the number of its members. It is possible that with the socialist development of society this centralisation may also later on become superfluous. But for the present it cannot be dispensed with in democracy. As was demonstrated at the end of the first division of this chapter it is an impossibility for the municipalities of great towns or industrial centres to take over under their own management all local productive and commercial undertakings. It is also, on practical grounds, improbable – not to mention grounds of equity which are against it – that they should "expropriate" those undertakings each and all offhand in a revolutionary upheaval. But even if they did (whereby in the majority of cases would only empty husks come into their hands) they would be obliged to lease the mass of the businesses to associations, whether individual or trade union, for associated management.

In every one of these cases, as also in the municipal and national undertakings, certain interests of the different trades would have to be protected, and so there would always remain a need for active supervision on the part of trade unions. In the transition period particularly, the multiplicity of organs will be of great value.

Meantime we are not yet so far on, and it is not my intention to unfold pictures of the future. I am not concerned with what will happen in the more distant future, but with what can and ought to happen in the present, for the present and the nearest future. And so the conclusion of this exposition is the very banal statement that the conquest of the democracy, the formation of political and social organs of the democracy, is the indispensable preliminary condition to the realisation of socialism.

Feudalism, with its unbending organisations and corporations, had to be destroyed nearly everywhere by violence. The liberal organisations of modern society are distinguished from those exactly because they are flexible, and capable of change and development. They do not need to be destroyed, but only to be further developed. For that we need organisation and energetic action, but not necessarily a revolutionary dictatorship. "As the object of the class war is especially to destroy distinctions of class," wrote some time since (October, 1897) a social democratic Swiss organ, the *Vorwärts* of Basle, "a period must logically be agreed upon in which the realisation of this object, of this ideal, must be begun. This beginning, these periods following on one another, are already founded in our democratic development; they come to our help, to serve gradually as a substitute

for the class war, to absorb it into themselves by the building up of the social democracy.” “The bourgeoisie, of whatever shade of opinion it may be,” declared lately the Spanish socialist, Pablo Iglesias, “must be convinced of this, that we do not wish to take possession of the Government by the same means that were once employed, by violence and bloodshed, but by lawful means which are suited to civilisation” (*Vorwärts*, October 16th, 1898). From a similar point of view the *Labour Leader*, the leading organ of the English Independent Labour Party, agreed unreservedly with the remarks of Vollmar on the Paris Commune. But no one will accuse this paper of timidity in fighting capitalism and the capitalist parties. And another organ of the English socialist working class democracy the *Clarion*, accompanied an extract from my article on the theory of catastrophic evolution with the following commentary:

The formation of a true democracy – I am quite convinced that that is the most pressing and most important duty which lies before us. This is the lesson which the socialist campaign of the last ten years has taught us. That is the doctrine which emerges out of all my knowledge and experiences of politics. We must build up a nation of democrats before socialism is possible.

2.2 Rosa Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution (1900)

Introduction

At first view the title of this work may be found surprising. Can the Social-Democracy be against reforms? Can we contrapose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not. The daily struggle for reforms, for the amelioration of the condition of the workers within the framework of the existing social order, and for democratic institutions, offers to the Social-Democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.

It is in Eduard Bernstein’s theory, presented in his articles on *Problems of Socialism*, *Neue Zeit* of 1897-98, and in his book *Die Voraussetzungen des Socialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* that we find, for the first time, the opposition of the two factors of the labour movement. His theory tends to counsel us to renounce the social transformation, the final goal of Social-Democracy and, inversely, to make of social reforms, the means of the class struggle, its aim. Bernstein himself has very clearly and characteristically formulated this viewpoint when he wrote: “The Final goal, no matter what it is, is nothing; the movement is everything.”

But since the final goal of socialism constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social-Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire labour movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order – the question: “Reform or Revolution”? as it is posed by Bernstein, equals for the Social-Democracy the question: “To be or not to be”? In the controversy with Bernstein and his followers, everybody in the Party ought to understand clearly it is not a question of this or that method of struggle, or the use of this or that set of tactics, but of the very existence of the Social-Democratic movement.

Upon a casual consideration of Bernstein’s theory, this may appear like an exaggeration. Does he not continually mention the Social-Democracy and its aims? Does he not repeat again and again, in very explicit language, that he too strives toward the final goal of socialism, but in another way? Does he not stress particularly that he fully approves of the present practice of the Social-Democracy?

That is all true, to be sure. It is also true that every new movement, when it first elaborates its theory and policy, begins by finding support in the preceding movement, though it may be in direct contradiction with the latter. It begins by suiting itself to the forms found at hand and by speaking the language spoken hereto. In time the new grain breaks through the old husk. The new movement finds its forms and its own language.

To expect an opposition against scientific socialism at its very beginning, to express itself clearly, fully and to the last consequence on the subject of its real content: to expect it to deny openly and bluntly the theoretic basis of the Social-Democracy – would amount to underrating the power of scientific socialism. Today he who wants to pass as a socialist, and at the same time declare war on Marxian doctrine, the most stupendous product of the human mind in the century, must begin with involuntary esteem for Marx. He must begin by acknowledging himself to be his disciple, by seeking in Marx's own teachings the points of support for an attack on the latter, while he represents this attack as a further development of Marxian doctrine. On this account, we must, unconcerned by its outer forms, pick out the sheathed kernel of Bernstein's theory. This is a matter of urgent necessity for the broad layers of the industrial proletariat in our Party.

No coarser insult, no baser aspersion, can be thrown against the workers than the remarks: "Theocratic controversies are only for academicians." Some time ago Lassalle said: "Only when science and the workers, these opposite poles of society, become one, will they crush in their arms of steel all obstacles to culture." The entire strength of the modern labour movement rests on theoretic knowledge.

But doubly important is this knowledge for the workers in the present case, because it is precisely they and their influence in the movement that are in the balance here. It is their skin that is being brought to market. The opportunist theory in the Party, the theory formulated by Bernstein, is nothing else than an unconscious attempt to assure predominance to the petty-bourgeois elements that have entered our Party, to change the policy and aims of our Party in their direction. The question of reform or revolution, of the final goal and the movement, is basically, in another form, but the question of the petty-bourgeois or proletarian character of the labour movement.

It is, therefore, in the interest of the proletarian mass of the Party to become acquainted, actively and in detail, with the present theoretic knowledge remains the privilege of a handful of "academicians" in the Party, the latter will face the danger of going astray. Only when the great mass of workers take the keen and dependable weapons of scientific socialism in their own hands, will all the petty-bourgeois inclinations, all the opportunistic currents, come to naught. The movement will then find itself on sure and firm ground. "Quantity will do it."

Chapter I: The Opportunist Method

If it is true that theories are only the images of the phenomena of the exterior world in the human consciousness, it must be added, concerning Eduard Bernstein's system, that theories are sometimes inverted images. Think of a theory of instituting socialism by means of social reforms in the face of the complete stagnation of the reform movement in Germany. Think of a theory of trade union control. Consider the theory of winning a majority in Parliament, after the revision of the constitution of Saxony and in view of the most recent attempts against universal suffrage. However, the pivotal point of Bernstein's system is not located in his conception of the practical tasks of the Social-Democracy. It is found in his stand on the course of the objective development of capitalist society, which, in turn is closely bound to his conception of the practical tasks of the Social-Democracy.

According to Bernstein, a general decline of capitalism seems to be increasingly improbable because, on the one hand, capitalism shows a greater capacity of adaptation, and, on the other hand, capitalist production becomes more and more varied.

The capacity of capitalism to adapt itself, says Bernstein, is manifested first in the disappearance of general crises, resulting from the development of the credit system, employers' organisations, wider means of communication and informational services. It shows itself secondly, in the tenacity of the middle classes, which hails from the growing differentiation of the branches of production and the elevation of vast layers of the proletariat to the level of the middle class. It is furthermore proved, argues Bernstein, by the amelioration of the economic and political situation of the proletariat as a result of its trade union activity.

From this theoretic stand is derived the following general conclusion about the practical work of the Social-Democracy. The latter must not direct its daily activity toward the conquest of political power, but toward the betterment of the condition of the working class, within the existing order. It must not expect to institute socialism as a result of a political and social crisis, but should build socialism by means of the progressive extension of social control and the gradual application of the principle of co-operation.

Bernstein himself sees nothing new in his theories. On the contrary, he believes them to be in agreement with certain declarations of Marx and Engels. Nevertheless, it seems to us that it is difficult to deny that they are in formal contradiction with the conceptions of scientific socialism.

If Bernstein's revisionism merely consisted in affirming that the march of capitalist development is slower than was thought before, he would merely be presenting an argument for adjourning the conquest of power by the proletariat, on which everybody agreed up to now. Its only consequence would be a slowing up of the pace of the struggle.

But that is not the case. What Bernstein questions is not the rapidity of the development of capitalist society, but the march of the development itself and, consequently, the very possibility of a change to socialism.

Socialist theory up to now declared that the point of departure for a transformation to socialism would be a general and catastrophic crisis. We must distinguish in this outlook two things: the fundamental idea and its exterior form.

The fundamental idea consists of the affirmation that capitalism, as a result of its own inner contradictions, moves toward a point when it will be unbalanced, when it will simply become impossible. There were good reasons for conceiving that juncture in the form of a catastrophic general commercial crisis. But that is of secondary importance when the fundamental idea is considered.

The scientific basis of socialism rests, as is well known, on three principal results of capitalist development. First, on the growing anarchy of capitalist economy, leading inevitably to its ruin. Second, on the progressive socialisation of the process of production, which creates the germs of the future social order. And third, on the increased organisation and consciousness of the proletarian class, which constitutes the active factor in the coming revolution.

Bernstein pulls away from the first of the three fundamental supports of scientific socialism. He says that capitalist development does not lead to a general economic collapse.

He does not merely reject a certain form of the collapse. He rejects the very possibility of collapse. He says textually: "One could claim that by collapse of the present society is meant something else than a general commercial crisis, worse than all others, that is a complete collapse of the capitalist system brought about as a result of its own contradictions." And to this he replies: "With the growing development of society a complete and almost general collapse of the present system of production becomes more and more improbable, because capitalist development increases on the

one hand the capacity of adaptation and, on the other – that is at the same time, the differentiation of industry.” (*Neue Zeit*, 1897-98, vol.18, pg.555)

But then the question arises: Why and how, in that case, can we attain the final goal? According to scientific socialism, the historic necessity of the socialist revolution manifests itself above all in the growing anarchy of capitalism, which drives the system into an impasse. But if one admits with Bernstein that capitalist development does not move in the direction of its own ruin, then socialism ceases to be objectively necessary. There remain the other two mainstays of the scientific explanation of socialism, which are also said to be consequences of capitalism itself: the socialisation of the process of production and the growing consciousness of the proletariat. It is these two matters that Bernstein has in mind when he says: “The suppression of the theory of collapse does not in any way deprive socialist doctrine of the power of persuasion. For, examined closely, what are all factors enumerated by us that make for the suppression or the modification of the former crises? Nothing else, in fact, than the conditions, or even in part the germs, of the socialisation of production and exchange.” (Ibid., pg.554)

Very little reflection is needed to understand that here too we face a false conclusion. Where lies the importance of all the phenomena that are said by Bernstein to be the means of capitalist adaptation – cartels, the credit system, the development of means of communication, the amelioration of the situation of the working class, etc.? Obviously, in that they suppress or, at least, attenuate the internal contradictions of capitalist economy, and stop the development or the aggravation of these contradictions. Thus the suppression of crises can only mean the suppression of the antagonism between production and exchange on the capitalist base. The amelioration of the situation of the working class, or the penetration of certain fractions of the class into middle layers, can only mean the attenuation of the antagonism between Capital and Labour. But if the aforementioned factors suppress the capitalist contradictions and consequently save the system from ruin, if they enable capitalism to maintain itself – and that is why Bernstein calls them “means of adaptation” – how can cartels, the credit system, trade unions, etc., be at the same time “the conditions and even, in part, the germs” of socialism? Obviously only in the sense that they express most clearly the social character of production.

But by presenting it in its capitalist form, the same factors render superfluous, inversely, in the same measure, the transformation of this socialised production into socialist production. That is why they can be the germs or conditions of a socialist order only in a theoretic sense and not in a historic sense. They are phenomena which, in the light of our conception of socialism, we know to be related to socialism but which, in fact, not only do not lead to a socialist revolution but render it, on the contrary, superfluous.

There remains one force making for socialism – the class consciousness of the proletariat. But it, too, is in the given case no the simple intellectual reflection of the growing contradictions of capitalism and its approaching decline. It is now no more than an ideal whose force of persuasion rests only on the perfection attributed to it.

We have here, in brief, the explanation of the socialist programme by means of “pure reason.” We have here, to use simpler language, an idealist explanation of socialism. The objective necessity of socialism, the explanation of socialism as the result of the material development of society, falls to the ground.

Revisionist theory thus places itself in a dilemma. Either the socialist transformation is, as was admitted up to now, the consequence of the internal contradictions of capitalism, and with the growth of capitalism will develop its inner contradictions, resulting inevitably, at some point, in its collapse, (in that case the “means of adaptation” are ineffective and the theory of collapse is

correct); or the “means of adaptation” will really stop the collapse of the capitalist system and thereby enable capitalism to maintain itself by suppressing its own contradictions. In that case socialism ceases to be an historic necessity. It then becomes anything you want to call it, but it is no longer the result of the material development of society.

The dilemma leads to another. Either revisionism is correct in its position on the course of capitalist development, and therefore the socialist transformation of society is only a utopia, or socialism is not a utopia, and the theory of “means of adaptation” is false. There is the question in a nutshell.

Chapter V: The Consequences of Social Reformism and General Nature of Reformism

In the first chapter we aimed to show that Bernstein’s theory lifted the program of the socialist movement off its material base and tried to place it on an idealist base. How does this theory fare when translated into practice?

Upon the first comparison, the party practice resulting from Bernstein’s theory does not seem to differ from the practice followed by the Social Democracy up to now. Formerly, the activity of the Social-Democratic Party consisted of trade union work, of agitation for social reforms and the democratisation of existing political institutions. The difference is not in the *what*, but in the *how*.

At present, the trade union struggle and parliamentary practice are considered to be the means of guiding and educating the proletariat in preparation for the task of taking over power. From the revisionist standpoint, this conquest of power is at the same time impossible or useless. And therefore, trade union and parliamentary activity are to be carried on by the party only for their immediate results, that is, for the purpose of bettering the present situation of the workers, for the gradual reduction of capitalist exploitation, for the extension of social control.

So that if we do not consider momentarily the immediate amelioration of the workers’ condition – an objective common to our party program as well as to revisionism – the difference between the two outlooks is, in brief, the following. According to the present conception of the party, trade-union and parliamentary activity are important for the socialist movement because such activity prepares the proletariat, that is to say, creates the *subjective* factor of the socialist transformation, for the task of realising socialism. But according to Bernstein, trade-unions and parliamentary activity gradually reduce capitalist exploitation itself. They remove from capitalist society its capitalist character. They realise *objectively* the desired social change.

Examining the matter closely, we see that the two conceptions are diametrically opposed. Viewing the situation from the current standpoint of our party, we say that as a result of its trade union and parliamentary struggles, the proletariat becomes convinced, of the impossibility of accomplishing a fundamental social change through such activity and arrives at the understanding that the conquest of power is unavoidable. Bernstein’s theory, however, begins by declaring that this conquest is impossible. It concludes by affirming that socialism can only be introduced as a result of the trade-union struggle and parliamentary activity. For as seen by Bernstein, trade union and parliamentary action has a socialist character because it exercises a progressively socialising influence on capitalist economy.

We tried to show that this influence is purely imaginary. The relations between capitalist property and the capitalist State develop in entirely opposite directions, so that the daily practical activity of the present Social Democracy loses, in the last analysis, all connection with work for socialism. From the viewpoint of a movement for socialism, the trade-union struggle and our parliamentary practice are vastly important in so far as they make socialistic the *awareness*, the consciousness,

of the proletariat and help to organise it as a class. But once they are considered as instruments of the direct socialisation of capitalist economy, they lose out not only their usual effectiveness but also cease being means of preparing the working class for the conquest of power. Eduard Bernstein and Konrad Schmidt suffer from a complete misunderstanding when they console themselves with the belief that even though the program of the party is reduced to work for social reforms and ordinary trade-union work, the final objective of the labour movement is not thereby discarded, for each forward step reaches beyond the given immediate aim and the socialist goal is implied as a tendency in the supposed advance.

That is certainly true about the present procedure of the German Social Democracy. It is true whenever a firm and conscious effort for conquest of political power impregnates the trade-union struggle and the work for social reforms. But if this effort is separated from the movement itself and social reforms are made an end in themselves, then such activity not only does not lead to the final goal of socialism but moves in a precisely opposite direction.

Konrad Schmidt simply falls back on the idea that an apparently mechanical movement, once started, cannot stop by itself, because "one's appetite grows with the eating," and the working class will not supposedly content itself with reforms till the final socialist transformation is realised.

Now the last mentioned condition is quite real. Its effectiveness is guaranteed by the very insufficiency of capitalist reforms. But the conclusion drawn from it could only be true if it were possible to construct an unbroken chain of augmented reforms leading from the capitalism of today to socialism. This is, of course, sheer fantasy. In accordance with the nature of things as they are the chain breaks quickly, and the paths that the supposed forward movement can take from the point on are many and varied.

What will be the immediate result should our party change its general procedure to suit a viewpoint that wants to emphasise the practical results of our struggle, that is social reforms? As soon as "immediate results" become the principal aim of our activity, the clear-cut, irreconcilable point of view, which has meaning only in so far as it proposes to win power, will be found more and more inconvenient. The direct consequence of this will be the adoption by the party of a "policy of compensation," a policy of political trading, and an attitude of diffident, diplomatic conciliation. But this attitude cannot be continued for a long time. Since the social reforms can only offer an empty promise, the logical consequence of such a program must necessarily be disillusionment.

It is not true that socialism will arise automatically from the daily struggle of the working class. Socialism will be the consequence of (1), the growing contradictions of capitalist economy and (2), of the comprehension by the working class of the unavailability of the suppression of these contradictions through a social transformation. When, in the manner of revisionism, the first condition is denied and the second rejected, the labour movement finds itself reduced to a simple co-operative and reformist movement. We move here in a straight line toward the total abandonment of the class viewpoint.

This consequence also becomes evident when we investigate the general character of revisionism. It is obvious that revisionism does not wish to concede that its standpoint is that of the capitalist apologist. It does not join the bourgeois economists in denying the existence of the contradictions of capitalism. But, on the other hand, what precisely constitutes the fundamental point of revisionism and distinguishes it from the attitude taken by the Social Democracy up to now, is that it does not base its theory on the belief that the contradictions of capitalism will be suppressed as a result of the logical inner development of the present economic system.

We may say that the theory of revisionism occupies an intermediate place between two extremes. Revisionism does not expect to see the contradictions of capitalism mature. It does not propose

to suppress these contradictions through a revolutionary transformation. It wants to lessen, to attenuate, the capitalist contradictions. So that the antagonism existing between production and exchange is to be mollified by the cessation of crises and the formation of capitalist combines. The antagonism between Capital and Labour is to be adjusted by bettering the situation of the workers and by the conservation of the middle classes. And the contradiction between the class State and society is to be liquidated through increased State control and the progress of democracy.

It is true that the present procedure of the Social Democracy does not consist in waiting for the antagonisms of capitalism to develop and in passing on, only then, to the task of suppressing them. On the contrary, the essence of revolutionary procedure is to be guided by the direction of this development, once it is ascertained, and inferring from this direction what consequences are necessary for the political struggle. Thus the Social Democracy has combated tariff wars and militarism without waiting for their reactionary character to become fully evident. Bernstein's procedure is not guided by a consideration of the development of capitalism, by the prospect of the aggravation of its contradictions. It is guided by the prospect of the attenuation of these contradictions. He shows this when he speaks of the "adaptation" of capitalist economy.

Now when can such a conception be correct? If it is true that capitalism will continue to develop in the direction it takes at present, then its contradictions must necessarily become sharper and more aggravated instead of disappearing. The possibility of the attenuation of the contradictions of capitalism presupposes that the capitalist mode of production itself will stop its progress. In short, the general condition of Bernstein's theory is the cessation of capitalist development.

This way, however, his theory condemns itself in a twofold manner.

In the first place, it manifests its *utopian* character in its stand on the establishment of socialism. For it is clear that a defective capitalist development cannot lead to a socialist transformation.

In the second place, Bernstein's theory reveals its *reactionary* character when it refers to the rapid capitalist development that is taking place at present. Given the development of real capitalism, how can we explain, or rather state, Bernstein's position?

We have demonstrated in the first chapter the baselessness of the economic conditions on which Bernstein builds his analysis of existing social relationships. We have seen that neither the credit system nor cartels can be said to be "means of adaptation" of capitalist economy. We have seen that not even the temporary cessation of crises nor the survival of the middle class can be regarded as symptoms of capitalist adaptation. But even though we should fail to take into account the erroneous character of all these details of Bernstein's theory we cannot help but be stopped short by one feature common to all of them. Bernstein's theory does not seize these manifestations of contemporary economic life as they appear in their organic relationship with the whole of capitalist development, with the complete economic mechanism of capitalism. His theory pulls these details out of their living economic context. It treats them as *dissecta membra* (separate parts) of a lifeless machine.

...

Revisionism is nothing else than a theoretic generalisation made from the angle of the isolated capitalist. Where does this viewpoint belong theoretically if not in vulgar bourgeois economics?

All the errors of this school rest precisely on the conception that mistakes the phenomena of competition, as seen from the angle of the isolated capitalist, for the phenomena of the whole of capitalist economy. Just as Bernstein considers credit to be a means of "adaptation," to the needs of exchange. Vulgar economy, too, tries to find the antidote against the ills of capitalism in the phenomena of capitalism. Like Bernstein, it believes that it is possible to regulate capitalist economy. And in the manner of Bernstein, it arrives in time at the desire to palliate the contradictions of

capitalism, that is, at the belief in the possibility of patching up the sores of capitalism. It ends up by subscribing to a program of reaction. It ends up in an utopia.

The theory of revisionism can therefore be defined in the following way. It is a theory of standing still in the socialist movement built, with the aid of vulgar economy, on a theory of capitalist standstill.

Chapter VIII: Conquest of Political Power

The fate of democracy is bound up, we have seen, with the fate of the labour movement. But does the development of democracy render superfluous or impossible a proletarian revolution, that is, the conquest of political power by the workers?

Bernstein settles the question by weighing minutely the good and bad sides of social reform and social revolution. He does it almost in the same manner in which cinnamon or pepper is weighed out in a consumers' co-operative store. He sees the legislative course of historic development as the action of "intelligence," while the revolutionary course of historic development is for him the action of "feeling." Reformist activity, he recognises as a slow method of historic progress, revolution as a rapid method of progress. In legislation he sees a methodical force; in revolution, a spontaneous force.

We have known for a long time that the petty-bourgeoisie reformer finds "good" and "bad" sides in everything. He nibbles a bit at all grasses. But the real course of events is little affected by such combination. The carefully gathered little pile of the "good sides" of all things possible collapses at the first fillip of history. Historically, legislative reform and the revolutionary method function in accordance with influences that are much more profound than the consideration of the advantages or inconveniences of one method or another.

In the history of bourgeois society, legislative reform served to strengthen progressively the rising class till the latter was sufficiently strong to seize political power, to suppress the existing juridical system and to construct itself a new one. Bernstein, thundering against the conquest of political power as a theory of Blanquist violence, has the misfortune of labelling as a Blanquist error that which has always been the pivot and the motive force of human history. From the first appearance of class societies having the class struggle as the essential content of their history, the conquest of political power has been the aim of all rising classes. Here is the starting point and end of every historic period. This can be seen in the long struggle of the Latin peasantry against the financiers and nobility of ancient Rome, in the struggle of the medieval nobility against the bishops and in the struggle of the artisans against the nobles, in the cities of the Middle Ages. In modern times, we see it in the struggle of the bourgeoisie against feudalism.

Legislative reform and revolution are not different methods of historic development that can be picked out at the pleasure from the counter of history, just as one chooses hot or cold sausages. Legislative reform and revolution are different *factors* in the development of class society. They condition and complement each other, and are at the same time reciprocally exclusive, as are the north and south poles, the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Every legal constitution is the *product* of a revolution. In the history of classes, revolution is the act of political creation, while legislation is the political expression of the life of a society that has already come into being. Work for reform does not contain its own force independent from revolution. During every historic period, work for reforms is carried on only in the direction given to it by the impetus of the last revolution and continues as long as the impulsion from the last revolution continues to make itself felt. Or, to put it more concretely, in each historic period work

for reforms is carried on only in the framework of the social form created by the last revolution. Here is the kernel of the problem.

It is contrary to history to represent work for reforms as a long-drawn out revolution and revolution as a condensed series of reforms. A social transformation and a legislative reform do not differ according to their duration but according to their content. The secret of historic change through the utilisation of political power resides precisely in the transformation of simple quantitative modification into a new quality, or to speak more concretely, in the passage of an historic period from one given form of society to another.

That is why people who pronounce themselves in favour of the method of legislative reform *in place and in contradistinction to* the conquest of political power and social revolution, do not really choose a more tranquil, calmer and slower road to the *same* goal, but a *different* goal. Instead of taking a stand for the establishment of a new society they take a stand for surface modifications of the old society. If we follow the political conceptions of revisionism, we arrive at the same conclusion that is reached when we follow the economic theories of revisionism. Our program becomes not the realisation of *socialism*, but the reform of *capitalism*; not the suppression of the wage labour system but the diminution of exploitation, that is, the suppression of the abuses of capitalism instead of suppression of capitalism itself.

Does the reciprocal role of legislative reform and revolution apply only to the class struggle of the past? It is possible that now, as a result of the development of the bourgeois juridical system, the function of moving society from one historic phase to another belongs to legislative reform and that the conquest of State power by the proletariat has really become “an empty phrase,” as Bernstein puts it?

The very opposite is true. What distinguishes bourgeois society from other class societies – from ancient society and from the social order of the Middle Ages? Precisely the fact that class domination does not rest on “acquired rights” but on *real economic relations* – the fact that wage labour is not a juridical relation, but purely an economic relation. In our juridical system there is not a single legal formula for the class domination of today. The few remaining traces of such formulae of class domination are (as that concerning servants), survivals of feudal society.

How can wage slavery be suppressed the “legislative way,” if wage slavery is not expressed the laws? Bernstein, who would do away with capitalism by means of legislative reforms, finds himself in the same situation as Uspensky’s Russian policeman who said: “Quickly I seized the rascal by the collar! But what do I see? The confounded fellow has no collar!” And that is precisely Bernstein’s difficulty.

“All previous societies were based on an antagonism between an oppressing class and an oppressed class” (*Communist Manifesto*). But in the preceding phases of modern society, this antagonism was expressed in distinctly determined juridical relations and could, especially because of that, accord, to a certain extent, a place to new relations within the framework of the old. “In the midst of serfdom, the serf raised himself to the rank of a member of the town community” (*Communist Manifesto*). How was that made possible? It was made possible by the progressive of all feudal privileges in the environs of the city: the corvée, the right to special dress, the inheritance tax, the lord’s claim to the best cattle, the personal levy, marriage under duress, the right to succession, etc., which all together constituted serfdom.

In the same way, the small bourgeoisie of the Middle Ages succeeded in raising itself, while it was still under the yoke of feudal absolutism, to the rank of bourgeoisie (*Communist Manifesto*). By what means? By means of the formal partial suppression or complete loosening of the corporative bonds, by the progressive transformation of the fiscal administration and of the army.

Consequently, when we consider the question from the abstract viewpoint, not from the historic viewpoint, we can *imagine* (in view of the former class relations) a legal passage, according to the reformist method, from feudal society to bourgeois society. But what do we see in reality? In reality, we see that legal reforms not only do not obviate the seizure of political power by the bourgeoisie but have, on the contrary, prepared for it and led to it. A formal social-political transformation was indispensable for the abolition of slavery as well as for the complete suppression of feudalism.

But the situation is entirely different now. No law obliges the proletariat to submit itself to the yoke of capitalism. Poverty, the lack of means of production, obliges the proletariat to submit itself to the yoke of capitalism. And no law in the world can give to the proletariat the means of production while it remains in the framework of bourgeois society, for not laws but economic development have torn the means of production from the producers' possession.

And neither is the exploitation inside the system of wage labour based on laws. The level of wages is not fixed by legislation but by economic factors. The phenomenon of capitalist exploitation does not rest on a legal disposition but on the purely economic fact that labour power plays in this exploitation the role of a merchandise possessing, among other characteristics, the agreeable quality of producing value – *more* than the value it consumes in the form of the labourer's means of subsistence. In short, the fundamental relations of the domination of the capitalist class cannot be transformed by means of legislative reforms, on the basis of capitalist society, because these relations have not been introduced by bourgeois laws, nor have they received the form of such laws. Apparently, Bernstein is not aware of this for he speaks of "socialist reforms." On the other hand, he seems to express implicit recognition of this when he writes, on page 10 of his book, "the economic motive acts freely today, while formerly it was masked by all kinds of relations of domination by all sorts of ideology."

It is one of the peculiarities of the capitalist order that within it all the elements of the future society first assume, in their development, a form not approaching socialism but, on the contrary, a form moving more and more away from socialism. Production takes on a progressively increasing social character. But under what form is the social character of capitalist production expressed? It is expressed in the form of the large enterprise, in the form of the shareholding concern, the cartel, within which the capitalist antagonisms, capitalist exploitation, the oppression of labour-power, are augmented to the extreme.

In the army, capitalist development leads to the extension of obligatory military service to the reduction of the time of service and consequently to a material approach to a popular militia. But all of this takes place under the form of modern militarism in which the domination of the people by the militarist State and the class character of the State manifest themselves most clearly.

In the field of political relations, the development of democracy brings – in the measure that it finds a favourable soil – the participation of all popular strata in political life and, consequently, some sort of "peoples State." But this participation takes the form of bourgeois parliamentarism, in which class antagonisms and class domination are not done away with, but are, on the contrary, displayed in the open. Exactly because capitalist development moves through these contradictions, it is necessary to extract the kernel of socialist society from its capitalist shell. Exactly for this reason must the proletariat seize political power and suppress completely the capitalist system.

Of course, Bernstein draws other conclusions. If the development of democracy leads to the aggravation and not to the lessening of capitalist antagonisms, "the Social-Democracy," he answers us, "in order not to render its task more difficult, must by all means try to stop social reforms and the extension of democratic institutions," (page 71). Indeed, that would be the right thing to do if the Social-Democracy found to its taste, in the petty-bourgeois manner, the futile task of picking

for itself all the good sides of history and rejecting the bad sides of history. However, in that case, it should at the same time “try to stop” capitalism in general, for there is not doubt that latter is the rascal placing all these obstacles in the way of socialism. But capitalism furnishes besides the *obstacles* also the only *possibilities* of realising the socialist programme. The same can be said about democracy.

If democracy has become superfluous or annoying to the bourgeoisie, it is on the contrary necessary and indispensable to the working class. It is necessary to the working class because it creates the political forms (autonomous administration, electoral rights, etc.) which will serve the proletariat as fulcrums in its task of transforming bourgeois society. Democracy is indispensable to the working class because only through the exercise of its democratic rights, in the struggle for democracy, can the proletariat become aware of its class interests and its historic task.

In a word, democracy is indispensable not because it renders superfluous the conquest of political power by the proletariat but because it renders this conquest of power both *necessary* and *possible*. When Engels, in his preface to the *Class Struggles in France*, revised the tactics of the modern labour movement and urged the legal struggle as opposed to the barricades, he did not have in mind – this comes out of every line of the preface – the question of a definite conquest of political power, but the contemporary daily struggle. He did not have in mind the attitude that the proletariat must take toward the capitalist State at the time of the seizure of power but the attitude of the proletariat while in the bounds of the capitalist State. Engels was giving directions to the proletariat *oppressed*, and not to the proletariat victorious.

On the other hand, Marx’s well known sentence on the agrarian question in England (Bernstein leans on it heavily), in which he says: “We shall probably succeed easier by buying the estates of the landlords,” does not refer to the stand of the proletariat before, but after its victory. For there evidently can be a question of buying the property of the old dominant class only when the workers are in power. The possibility envisaged by Marx is that of the *peaceful exercise of the dictatorship of the proletariat* and not the replacement of the dictatorship with capitalist social reforms. There was no doubt for Marx and Engels about the necessity of having the proletariat conquer political power. It is left to Bernstein to consider the poultry-yard of bourgeois parliamentarism as the organ by means of which we are to realise the most formidable social transformation of history, *the passage from capitalist society to socialism*.

Bernstein introduces his theory by warning the proletariat against the danger of acquiring power too early. That is, according to Bernstein, the proletariat ought to leave the bourgeois society in its present condition and itself suffer a frightful defeat. If the proletariat came to power, it could draw from Bernstein’s theory the following “practical” conclusion: to go to sleep. His theory condemns the proletariat at the most decisive moments of the struggle, to inactivity, to a passive betrayal of its own cause.

Our programme would be a miserable scrap of paper if it could not serve us in *all* eventualities, at *all* moments of the struggle and if it did not serve us by its *application* and not by its non-application. If our programme contains the formula of the historical development of society from capitalism to socialism, it must also formulate, in all its characteristic fundamentals, all the transitory phases of this development and it should, consequently, be able to indicate to the proletariat what ought to be its corresponding action at every moment on the road toward socialism. There can be no time for the proletariat when it will be obliged to abandon its programme or be abandoned by it.

Practically, this is manifested in the fact that there can be no time when the proletariat, placed in power by the force of events, is not in the condition or is not morally obliged to take certain measures for the realisation of its programme, that is, take transitory measures in the direction of

socialism. Behind the belief that the socialist programme can collapse completely at any point of the dictatorship of the proletariat lurks the other belief that the *socialist programme is generally and at all times, unrealisable*.

And what if the transitory measures are premature? The question hides a great number of mistaken ideas concerning the real course of a social transformation.

In the first place, the seizure of political power by the proletariat, that is to say by a large popular class, is not produced artificially. It presupposes (with the exception of such cases as the Paris Commune, when the proletariat did not obtain power after a conscious struggle for its goal but fell into its hands like a good thing abandoned by everybody else) a definite degree of maturity of economic and political relations. Here we have the essential difference between *coups d'état* along Blanqui's conception which are accomplished by an "active minority" and burst out like pistol shot, always inopportunistly, and the conquest of political power by a great conscious popular mass which can only be the product of the decomposition of bourgeois society and therefore bears in itself the economic and political legitimisation of its opportunist appearance.

If, therefore, considered from the angle of political effect the conquest of political power by the working class cannot materialise itself "too early" then from the angle of conservation of power, the premature revolution, the thought of which keeps Bernstein awake, menaces us like a sword of Damocles. Against that neither prayers nor supplication, neither scares nor any amount of anguish, are of any avail. And this for two very simple reasons.

In the first place, it is impossible to imagine that a transformation as formidable as the passage from capitalist society to socialist society can be realised in one happy act. To consider that as possible is, again, to lend colour to conceptions that are clearly Blanquist. The socialist transformation supposes a long and stubborn struggle, in the course of which, it is quite probable the proletariat will be repulsed more than once so that for the first time, from the viewpoint of the final outcome of the struggle, it will have necessarily come to power "too early."

In the second place, it will be impossible to avoid the "premature" conquest of State power by the proletariat precisely because these "premature" attacks of the proletariat constitute a factor and indeed a very important factor, creating the political conditions of the final victory. In the course of the political crisis accompanying its seizure of power, in the course of the long and stubborn struggles, the proletariat will acquire the degree of political maturity permitting it to obtain in time a definitive victory of the revolution. Thus these "premature" attacks of the proletariat against the State power are in themselves important historic factors helping to provoke and determine the *point* of the definite victory. Considered from this viewpoint, the idea of a "premature" conquest of political power by the labouring class appears to be a polemic absurdity derived from a mechanical conception of the development of society, and positing for the victory of the class struggle a point fixed *outside* and *independent of* the class struggle.

Since the proletariat is not in the position to seize power in any other way than "prematurely," since the proletariat is absolutely obliged to seize power once or several times "too early" before it can maintain itself in power for good, the objection to the "premature" conquest of power is at bottom nothing more than a *general opposition to the aspiration of the proletariat to possess itself of State power*. Just as all roads lead to Rome so too do we logically arrive at the conclusion that the revisionist proposal to slight the final aim of the socialist movement is really a recommendation to renounce the socialist movement itself.

Week 3

Social Democracy After 1905

In 1905, a massacre of workers by Tsarist troops sparked an uprising among the Russian populace. The movement featured a wave of large-scale strikes, and ended up winning some political and economic reforms. Many radicals viewed The Russian Revolution of 1905, as it would come to be known, as a model for future struggles.

Rosa Luxemburg's *The Mass Strike* attempts to summarize and make sense of the previous year's events. As an eyewitness to and participant in 1905's struggles, her interpretation of the revolt's dynamics was influential, even as she clashed with others in the SPD on the subject.

Anton Pannekoek, a Dutch council communist and astronomer, also found himself in conflict with both revisionist and orthodox theoreticians on the issue of mass action. In *Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics*, Pannekoek critiques Kautsky's ideology of proletarian action.

The Eley chapters for this week are 5 and 6.

3.1 Rosa Luxemburg, The Mass Strike (1906)

I. The Russian Revolution, Anarchism and the General Strike

Almost all works and pronouncement of international socialism on the subject of the mass strike date from the time before the Russian Revolution [of 1905], the first historical experience on a very large scale with the means of struggle. It is therefore evident that they are, for the most part, out-of-date. Their standpoint is essentially that of Engels who in 1873 wrote as follows in his criticism of the revolutionary blundering of the Bakuninist in Spain:

The general strike, in the Bakuninists' program, is the lever which will be used for introducing the social revolution. One fine morning all the workers in every industry in a country, or perhaps in every country, will cease work, and thereby compel the ruling class either to submit in about four weeks, or to launch an attack on the workers so that the latter will have the right to defend themselves, and may use the opportunity to overthrow the old society. The proposal is by no means new: French and Belgian socialists have paraded it continually since 1848, but for all that is of English origin. During the rapid and powerful development of Chartism among the English workers that followed the crisis of 1837, the "holy month" – a suspension of work on a national scale – was preached as early as 1839, and was received with such favour that in July

1842 the factory workers of the north of England attempted to carry it out. And at the Congress of the Alliansists at Geneva on September 1, 1873, the general strike played a great part, but it was admitted on all sides to carry it out it was necessary to have a perfect organisation of the working-class and a full war chest. And that is the crux of the question. On the one hand, the governments, especially if they are encouraged by the workers' abstention from political action, will never allow the funds of the workers to become large enough, and on the other hand, political events and the encroachments of the ruling class will bring about the liberation of the workers long before the proletariat gets the length of forming this ideal organisation and this colossal reserve fund. But if they had these, they would not need to make use of the roundabout way of the general strike in order to attain their object.

Here we have the reasoning that was characteristic of the attitude of international social democracy towards the mass strike in the following decades. It is based on the anarchist theory of the general strike – that is, the theory of the general strike as a means of inaugurating the social revolution, in contradistinction to the daily political struggle of the working-class – and exhausts itself in the following simple dilemma: either the proletariat as a whole are not yet in possession of the powerful organisation and financial resources required, in which case they cannot carry through the general strike; or they are already sufficiently well organised, in which case they do not need the general strike. This reasoning is so simple and at first glance so irrefutable that, for a quarter of a century, it has rendered excellent service to the modern labour movement as a logical weapon against the anarchist phantom and as a means of carrying out the idea of political struggle to the widest circles of the workers. The enormous strides taken by the labour movement in all capitalist countries during the last twenty-five years are the most convincing evidence of the value of the tactics of political struggle, which were insisted upon by Marx and Engels in opposition to Bakuninism and German social democracy, in its position of vanguard of the entire international labour movement is not in the least the direct product of the consistent and energetic application of these tactics.

The [1905] Russian Revolution has now effected a radical revision of the above piece of reasoning. For the first time in the history of the class struggle it has achieved a grandiose realisation of the idea of the mass strike and – as we shall discuss later – has even matured the general strike and thereby opened a new epoch in the development of the labour movement. It does not, of course, follow from this that the tactics of political struggle recommended by Marx and Engels were false or that criticism applied by them to anarchism was incorrect. On the contrary, it is the same train of ideas, the same method, the Engels-Marxian tactics, which lay at the foundation of the previous practice of the German social democracy, which now in the Russian Revolution are producing new factors and new conditions in the class struggle. The Russian Revolution, which is the first historical experiment on the model of the class strike, not merely does not afford a vindication of anarchism, but actually means *the historical liquidation of anarchism*. The sorry existence to which this mental tendency was condemned in recent decades by the powerful development of social democracy in Germany may, to a certain extent, be explained by the exclusive domination and long duration of the parliamentary period. A tendency patterned entirely upon the “first blow” and “direct action,” a tendency “revolutionary” in the most naked pitchfork sense, can only temporarily languish in the calm of parliamentarian day and, on a return of the period of direct open struggle, can come to life again and unfold its inherent strength.

Russia, in particular, appeared to have become the experimental field for the heroic deeds of anarchism. A country in which the proletariat had absolutely no political rights and extremely weak

organisations, a many-coloured complex of various sections of the population, a chaos of conflicting interests, a low standard of education amongst the masses of the people, extreme brutality in the use of violence on the part of the prevailing regime – all this seemed as if created to raise anarchism to a sudden if perhaps short-lived power. And finally, Russia was the historical birthplace of anarchism. But the fatherland of Bakunin was to become the burial-place of his teachings. Not only did and do the anarchists in Russia not stand at the head of the mass strike movement; not only does the whole political leadership of revolutionary action and also of the mass strike lie in the hands of the social democratic organisations, which are bitterly opposed as “bourgeois parties” by Russian anarchists, or partly in the hands of such socialist organisations as are more or less influenced by the social democracy and more or less approximate to it – such as the terrorist party, the “socialist revolutionaries” – but the anarchists simply do not exist as a serious political tendency in the Russian Revolution. Only in a small Lithuanian town with particularly difficult conditions – a confused medley of different nationalities among the workers, an extremely scattered condition of small-scale industry, a very severely oppressed proletariat – in Bialystok, there is, amongst the seven or eight different revolutionary groups a handful of half-grown “anarchists” who promote confusion and bewilderment amongst the workers to the best of their ability; and lastly in Moscow, and perhaps in two or three other towns, a handful of people of this kidney make themselves noticeable.

But apart from these few “revolutionary” groups, what is the actual role of anarchism in the Russian Revolution? It has become the sign of the common thief and plunderer; a large proportion of the innumerable thefts and acts of plunder of private persons are carried out under the name of “anarchist-communism” – acts which rise up like a troubled wave against the revolution in every period of depression and in every period of temporary defensive. Anarchism has become in the Russian Revolution, not the theory of the struggling proletariat, but the ideological signboard of the counterrevolutionary lumpenproletariat, who, like a school of sharks, swarm in the wake of the battleship of the revolution. And therewith the historical career of anarchism is well-nigh ended.

On the other hand, the mass strike in Russia has been realised not as means of evading the political struggle of the working-class, and especially of parliamentarism, not as a means of jumping suddenly into the social revolution by means of a theatrical coup, but as a means, firstly, of creating for the proletariat the conditions of the daily political struggle and especially of parliamentarism. The revolutionary struggle in Russia, in which mass strikes are the most important weapon, is, by the working people, and above all by the proletariat, conducted for those political rights and conditions whose necessity and importance in the struggle for the emancipation of the working-class Marx and Engels first pointed out, and in opposition to anarchism fought for with all their might in the International. Thus has historical dialectics, the rock on which the whole teaching of Marxian socialism rests, brought it about that today anarchism, with which the idea of the mass strike is indissolubly associated, has itself come to be opposed to the mass strike which was combated as the opposite of the political activity of the proletariat, appears today as the most powerful weapon of the struggle for political rights. If, therefore, the Russian Revolution makes imperative a fundamental revision of the old standpoint of Marxism on the question of the mass strike, it is once again Marxism whose general method and points of view have thereby, in new form, carried off the prize. The Moor’s beloved can die only by the hand of the Moor.

II. The Mass Strike, A Historical and Not an Artificial Product

The first revision of the question of the mass strike which results from the experience of Russia relates to the general conception of the problem. Till the present time the zealous advocates of an

“attempt with the mass strike” in Germany of the stamp of Bernstein, Eisner, etc., and also the strongest opponents of such an attempt as represented in the trade-union camp by, for example, Bombelburg, stand when all is said and done, on the same conception, and that is the anarchist one. The apparent polar opposites do not mutually exclude each other but, as always, condition, and at the same time, supplement each other. For the anarchist mode of thought is direct speculation on the “great *Kladderadatsch*,” on the social revolution merely as an external and inessential characteristic. According to it, what is essential is the whole abstract, unhistorical view of the mass strike and of all the conditions of the proletariat struggle generally.

For the anarchist there exist only two things as material suppositions of his “revolutionary” speculations – first, imagination, and second goodwill and courage to rescue humanity from the existing capitalist vale of tears. This fanciful mode of reasoning sixty years ago gave the result that the mass strike was the shortest, surest and easiest means of springing into the better social future. The same mode of reasoning recently gave the result that the trade-union struggle was the only real “direct action of the masses” and also the only real revolutionary struggle – which, as is well known, is the latest notion of the French and Italian “syndicalists.” The fatal thing for anarchism has always been that the methods of struggle improvised in the air were not only a reckoning without their host, that is, they were purely utopian, but that they, while not reckoning in the least with the despised evil reality, unexpectedly became in this evil reality, practical helps to the reaction, where previously they had only been, for the most part, revolutionary speculations.

On the same ground of abstract, unhistorical methods of observation stand those today who would, in the manner of a board of directors, put the mass strike in Germany on the calendar on an appointed day, and those who, like the participants in the trade-union congress at Cologne, would by a prohibition of “propaganda” eliminate the problem of the mass strike from the face of the earth. Both tendencies proceed on the common purely anarchistic assumption that the mass strike is a purely technical means of struggle which can be “decided” at the pleasure and strictly according to conscience, or “forbidden” – a kind of pocket-knife which can be kept in the pocket clasped “ready for any emergency,” and according to the decision, can be unclasped and used. The opponents of the mass strike do indeed claim for themselves the merit of taking into consideration the historical groundwork and the material conditions of the present conditions in Germany in opposition to the “revolutionary romanticists” who hover in the air, and do not at any point reckon with the hard realities and the possibilities and impossibilities. “Facts and figures; figures and facts!” they cry, like Mr. Gadgrind in Dickens’ *Hard Times*.

What the trade-union opponent of the mass strike understands by the “historical basis” and “material conditions” is two things – on the one hand the weakness of the proletariat, and on the other hand, the strength of Prussian-German militarism. The inadequate organisation of the workers and the imposing Prussian bayonet – these are the facts and figures upon which these trade-union leaders base their practical policy in the given case. Now when it is quite true that the trade-union cash box and the Prussian bayonet are material and very historical phenomena, but the conception based upon them is not historical materialism in Marx’s sense but a policemanlike materialism in the sense of Puttkammer. The representatives of the capitalist police state reckon on much, and indeed, exclusively, with the occasional real power of the organised proletariat as well as with the material might of the bayonet, and from the comparative example of these two rows of figures the comforting conclusion is always drawn that the revolutionary labour movement is produced by individual demagogues and agitators; and that therefore there is in the prisons and bayonets an adequate means of subduing the unpleasant “passing phenomena.”

The class-conscious German workers have at last grasped the humour of the policemanlike

theory that the whole modern labour movement is an artificial, arbitrary product of a handful of conscienceless “demagogues and agitators.”

It is exactly the same conception, however, that finds expression when two or three worthy comrades unite in a voluntary column of night-watchmen in order to warn the German working-class against the dangerous agitation of a few “revolutionary romanticists” and their “propaganda of the mass strike”; or, when on the other side, a noisy indignation campaign is engineered by those who, by means of “confidential” agreements between the executive of the party and the general commission of the trade unions, believe they can prevent the outbreak of the mass strike in Germany.

If it depended on the inflammatory “propaganda” of revolutionary romanticists or on confidential or public decisions of the party direction, then we should not even yet have had in Russia a single serious mass strike. In no country in the world – as I pointed out in March 1905 in the *Sächsische Arbeiterzeitung* – was the mass strike so little “propagated” or even “discussed” as in Russia. And the isolated examples of decisions and agreements of the Russian party executive which really sought to proclaim the mass strike of their own accord – as, for example, the last attempt in August of this year after the dissolution of the Duma – are almost valueless.

If, therefore, the Russian Revolution teaches us anything, it teaches above all that the mass strike is not artificially “made,” not “decided” at random, not “propagated,” but that it is a historical phenomenon which, at a given moment, results from social conditions with historical inevitability. It is not, therefore, by abstract speculations on the possibility or impossibility, the utility or the injuriousness of the mass strike, but only by an examination of those factors and social conditions out of which the mass strike grows in the present phase of the class struggle – in other words, it is not by *subjective criticism* of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is desirable, but only by *objective investigation* of the sources of the mass strike from the standpoint of what is historically inevitable, that the problem can be grasped or even discussed.

In the unreal sphere of abstract logical analysis it can be shown with exactly the same force on either side that the mass strike is absolutely impossible and sure to be defeated, and that it is possible and that its triumph cannot be questioned. And therefore the value of the evidence led on each side is exactly the same – and that is nil. Therefore, the fear of the “propagation” of the mass strike, which has even led to formal anathemas against the persons alleged to be guilty of this crime, is solely the product of the droll confusion of persons. It is just as impossible to “propagate” the mass strike as an abstract means of struggle as it is to propagate the “revolution.” “Revolution” like “mass strike” signifies nothing but an external form of the class struggle, which can have sense and meaning only in connection with definite political situations.

If anyone were to undertake to make the mass strike generally, as a form of proletarian action, the object of methodological agitation, and to go house-to-house canvassing with this “idea” in order to gradually win the working-class to it, it would be as idle and profitless and absurd an occupation as it would be to seek to make the idea of the revolution or of the fight at the barricades the object of a special agitation. The mass strike has now become the centre of the lively interest of the German and the international working-class because it is a new form of struggle, and as such is the sure symptom of a thoroughgoing internal revolution in the relations of the classes and in the conditions of the class struggle. It is a testimony to the sound revolutionary instinct and to the quick intelligence of the mass of the German proletariat that, in spite of the obstinate resistance of their trade-union leaders, they are applying themselves to this new problem with such keen interest.

But it does not meet the case, in the presence of this interest and of this fine, intellectual thirst and desire for revolutionary deeds on the part of the workers, to treat them to abstract mental

gymnastics on the possibility or impossibility of the mass strike; they should be enlightened on the development of the Russian Revolution, the international significance of that revolution, the sharpening of class antagonisms in Western Europe, the wider political perspectives of the class struggle in Germany, and the role and the tasks of the masses in the coming struggles. Only in this form will the discussion on the mass strike lead to the widening of the intellectual horizon of the proletariat, to the sharpening of their way of thinking, and to the steeling of their energy.

Viewed from this standpoint however, the criminal proceedings desired by the enemies of “revolutionary romanticism” appear in all their absurdity, because, in treating of the problem, one does not adhere strictly to the text of the Jena resolution. The “practical politicians” agree to this resolution if need be, because they couple the mass strike chiefly with the fate of universal suffrage, from which it follows that they can believe in two things – first, that the mass strike is of a purely defensive character, and second, that the mass strike is even subordinate to parliamentarism, that is, has been turned into a mere appendage of parliamentarism. But the real kernel of the Jena resolution in this connection is that in the present position of Germany an attempt on the part of the prevailing reaction on the parliamentary vote would in all probability be the moment for the introduction of, and the signal for, a period of stormy political struggles in which the mass strike as a means of struggle in Germany might well come into use for the first time.

But to seek to narrow and to artificially smother the social importance, and to limit the historical scope, of the mass strike as a phenomenon and as a problem of the class struggle by the wording of a congress resolution is an undertaking which for short-sightedness can only be compared with the veto on discussion of the trade-union congress at Cologne. In the resolution of the Jena Congress, German social democracy has officially taken notice of the fundamental change which the Russian Revolution [of 1905] has effected in the international conditions of the proletarian class struggle, and has announced its capacity for revolutionary development and its power of adaptability to the new demands of the coming phase of the class struggle. Therein lies the significance of the Jena resolution. As for the peaceful application of the mass strike in Germany, history will decide that as it decided it in Russia – history in which German social democracy with its decisions is, it is true, an important factor, but, as the same time, only *one* factor amongst many.

III. Development of the Mass Strike Movement in Russia

The mass strike, as it appears for the most part in the discussion in Germany, is a very clear and simply thought out, sharply sketched isolated phenomenon. It is the political mass strike exclusively that is spoken of. What is meant by it is a single grand rising of the industrial proletariat springing from some political motive of the highest importance, and undertaken on the basis of an opportune and mutual understanding on the part of the controlling authorities of the new party and of the trade unions, and carried through in the spirit of party discipline and in perfect order, and in still more perfect order brought to the directing committees as a signal given at the proper time, by which committees the regulation of support, the cost, the sacrifice – in a word, the whole material balance of the mass strike – is exactly determined in advance.

Now, when we compare this theoretical scheme with the real mass strike, as it appeared in Russia five years ago, we are compelled to say that this representation, which in the German discussion occupies the central position, hardly corresponds to a single one of the many mass strikes that have taken place, and on the other hand that the mass strike in Russia displays such a multiplicity of the most varied forms of action that it is altogether impossible to speak of “the” mass strike, of an abstract schematic mass strike. All the factors of the mass strike, as well as its character, are not

only different in the different towns and districts of the country, but its general character has often changed in the course of the revolution. The mass strike has passed through a definite history in Russia, and is passing still further through it. Who, therefore, speaks of the mass strike in Russia must, above all things, keep its history before his eyes.

The present official period, so to speak, of the Russian Revolution is justly dated from the rising of the proletariat on January 22, 1905, when the demonstration of 200,000 workers ended in a frightful bloodbath before the czar's palace. The bloody massacre in St. Petersburg was, as is well known, the signal for the outbreak of the first gigantic series of mass strikes which spread over the whole of Russia within a few days and which carried the call to action of the revolution from St. Petersburg to every corner of the empire and amongst the widest sections of the proletariat. But the St. Petersburg rising of January 22 was only the critical moment of a mass strike, which the proletariat of the czarist capital had previously entered upon in January 1905. The January mass strike was without doubt carried through under the immediate influence of the gigantic general strike, which in December 1904 broke out in the Caucasus. In Baku, and for a long time kept the whole of Russia in suspense. The events of December in Baku were on their part only the last and powerful ramification of those tremendous mass strikes which, like a periodic earthquake, shook the whole of south Russia, and whose prologue was the mass strike in Batum in the Caucasus in March 1902.

This first mass strike movement in the continuous series of present revolutionary eruptions is finally separated by five or six years from the great general strike of the textile workers in St. Petersburg in 1896 and 1897, and if this movement is apparently separated from the present revolution by a few years of apparent stagnation and strong reaction, everyone who knows the inner political development of the Russian proletariat to their present stage of class consciousness and revolutionary energy will realise that the history of the present period of the mass struggles begins with those general strikes in St. Petersburg. They are therefore for the problems of the mass strike because they already contain, in the germ, all the principal factors of later mass strikes.

Again, the St. Petersburg general strike of 1896 appears as a purely economic partial wage struggle. Its causes were the intolerable working conditions of the spinners and weavers in St. Petersburg; a working day of thirteen, fourteen or fifteen hours, miserable piecework rates, and a whole series of contemptible chicaneries on the part of the employers. The workers, however, patiently endured this condition of things, for a long time till an apparently trivial circumstance filled the cup to overflowing. The coronation of the present czar, Nicholas II, which had been postponed for two years through fear of the revolutionaries, was celebrated in May 1896, and on that occasion the St. Petersburg employers displayed their patriotic zeal by giving their workers three days compulsory holidays, for which, curious to relate, they did not desire to pay their employees. The workers angered by this began to move. After a conference of about three hundred of the intelligent workers in the Ekaterinhof Garden a strike was decided upon, and the following demands were formulated: first, payment of wages for the coronation holidays; second, a working day of ten hours; third, increased rates for piecework. This happened on May 24. In a week every weaving and spinning establishment was at a standstill and 40,000 workers were in the general strike. Today, this event, measured by the gigantic mass strike of the revolution, may appear a little thing. In the political polar rigidity of the Russia of that time a general strike was something unheard of; it was even a complete revolution in little. There began, of course, the most brutal persecution. About one thousand workers were arrested and the general strike was suppressed.

Here, already, we see all the fundamental characteristics of the later mass strikes. The next occasion of the movement was wholly accidental, even unimportant, its outbreak elementary; but

in the success of the movement the fruits of the agitation, extending over several years, of the social democracy were seen and in the course of the general strike the social democratic agitators stood at the head of the movement, directed it, and used it to stir up revolutionary agitation. Further, the strike was outwardly a mere economic struggle for wages, but the attitude of the government and the agitation of the social democracy made it a political phenomenon of the first rank. And lastly, the strike was suppressed; the workers suffered a "defeat." But in January of the following year the textile workers of St. Petersburg repeated the general strike once more and achieved this time a remarkable success: the legal introduction of a working day of eleven hours throughout the whole of Russia. What was nevertheless a much more important result was this: since the first general strike of 1896 which was entered upon without a trace of organisation or of strike funds, an intensive trade-union fight began in Russia proper which spread from St. Petersburg to the other parts of the country and opened up entirely new vistas to social democratic agitation and organisation, and by which to the apparently death-like peace of the following period, the revolution was prepared for by underground work.

The outbreak of the Caucasian strike in March 1902 was apparently as accidental and as much due to pure economic partial causes (although produced by quite other factors) as that of 1896. It was connected with the serious industrial and commercial crisis which, in Russia, was the precursor of the Japanese war and which, together with it, was the most powerful factor of the nascent revolutionary ferment. The crisis produced an enormous mass of unemployment which nourished the agitation amongst the proletarian masses, and therefore the government, to restore tranquillity amongst the workers, undertook to transport the "superfluous hands" in batches to their respective home districts. One such measure, which was to affect about four hundred petroleum workers called forth a mass protest in Batum, which led to demonstrations, arrests, a massacre, and finally to a political trial in which the purely economic and partial affair suddenly became a political and revolutionary event. The reverberation of the wholly "fruitless" expiring and suppressed strike in Batum was a series of revolutionary mass demonstrations of workers in Nizhni Novgorod, Saratov, and other towns, and therefore a mighty surge forward of the general wave of the revolutionary movement.

Already in November 1902 the first genuine revolutionary echo followed in the shape of a general strike at Rostov-on-Don. Disputes about the rates of pay in the workshops of the Vladicaucasus Railway gave the impetus to this movement. The management sought to reduce wages and therefore the Don committee of social democracy issued a proclamation with a summons to strike for the following demands: a nine-hour day, increase in wages, abolition of fines, dismissal of obnoxious engineers, etc. Entire railway workshops participated in the strike. Presently all other industries joined in and suddenly an unprecedented state of affairs prevailed in Rostov: every industrial work was at a standstill, and every day monster meetings of fifteen to twenty thousand were held in the open air, sometimes surrounded by a cordon of Cossacks, at which for the first time social democratic popular speakers appeared publicly, inflammatory speeches on socialism and political freedom were delivered and received with immense enthusiasm, and revolutionary appeals were distributed by tens of thousands of copies. In the midst of rigid absolutist Russia the proletariat of Rostov won for the first time the right of assembly and freedom of speech by storm. It goes without saying that there was a massacre here. The disputes over wages in the Vladicaucasus Railway workshops grew in a few days into a political general strike and a revolutionary street battle. As an echo to this they're followed immediately a general strike at the station of Tichoretzkaia on the same railway. Here also a massacre took place and also a trial, and thus even Tichoretzkaia has taken its place in the indissoluble chain of the factors of the revolution.

The spring of 1903 gave the answer to the defeated strikes in Rostov and Tichoretzkaia; the whole of South Russia in May, June and July was aflame. Baku, Tiflis, Batum, Elisavetgrad, Odessa, Kiev, Nikolaev and Ekaterinoslav were in a general strike in the literal meaning of those words. But here again the movement did not arise on any preconceived plan from one another; it flowed together from individual points in each one from different causes and in a different form. The beginning was made by Baku where several partial wage struggles in individual factories and departments culminated in a general strike. In Tiflis, the strike was begun by 2000 commercial employees who had a working day from six o'clock in the morning to eleven at night. On the fourth of July they all left their shops and made a circuit of the town to demand from the proprietors of the shops that they close their premises. The victory was complete; the commercial employees won a working day from eight in the morning to eight in the evening, and all the factories, workshops and offices, etc, immediately joined them. The newspapers did not appear, and tramway traffic could not be carried on under military protection.

In Elisavetgrad on July 4 a strike began in all the factories with purely economic demands. These were mostly conceded, and the strike ended on the fourteenth. Two weeks later however it broke out again. The bakers this time gave the word and the bricklayers, the joiners, the dyers, the mill-workers, and finally all factory workers joined them.

In Odessa the movement began with a wage struggle in the course of which the "legal" workers' union, founded by government agents according to the programme of the famous gendarme Zubatov, was developed. Historical dialectics had again seized the occasion to play one of its malicious little pranks. The economic struggles of the earlier period (amongst them the great St. Petersburg general strike of 1896) had misled Russian social democracy into exaggerating the importance of so-called economics, and in this way the ground had been prepared amongst the workers for the demagogic activities of Zubatov. After a time, however, the great revolutionary stream turned round the little ship with the false flag and compelled it to ride right at the head of the revolutionary proletarian flotilla. The Zubatovian unions gave the signal for the great general strike in Odessa in the spring of 1904, as for the general strike in St. Petersburg in January 1905. The workers of Odessa, who were not to be deceived by the appearance of friendliness on the part of the government for the workers, and of its sympathy with purely economic strikes, suddenly demanded proof by example, and compelled the Zubatovian "workers union" in a factory to declare a strike for very moderate demands. They were immediately thrown on the streets, and when they demanded the protection of the authorities which was promised them by their leader, the gentleman vanished and left the workers in the wildest excitement.

The social democrats at once placed themselves at the head of affairs, and the strike movement extended to other factories. On the first day of July 2,500 dockers struck work for an increase of wages from eighty kopecks to two rubles, and the shortening of the work day by half-an-hour. On the sixteenth day of July the seamen joined the movement. On the thirteenth day the tramway staff began a strike. Then a meeting took place of all the strikers, seven or eight thousand men; they formed a procession which went from factory to factory, growing like an avalanche, and presently a crowd of forty to fifty thousand betook themselves to the docks in order to bring all work there to a standstill. A general strike soon reigned throughout the whole city.

In Kiev, a strike began in the railway workshops on July 21st. Here, also, the immediate cause was miserable conditions of labour, and wage demands were presented. On the following day the foundry men followed the example. On July 23rd, an incident occurred which gave the signal for the general strike. During the night two delegates of the railwaymen were arrested. The strikers immediately demanded their release, and as this was not conceded, they decided not to allow trains

to leave the town. At the station all the strikers with their wives and families sat down on the railway track – a sea of human beings. They were threatened with rifle salvos. The workers bared their breasts and cried, “Shoot!” A salvo was fired into the defenceless seated crowd, and thirty to forty corpses, amongst them women and children, remained on the ground. On this becoming known the whole town of Kiev went on strike on the same day. The corpses of the murdered workers were raised on high by the crowd and carried round in a mass demonstration. Meetings, speeches, arrests, isolated street fights – Kiev was in the midst of the revolution. The movement was soon at an end. But the printers had won a shortening of the working day by one hour and a wage increase of one rouble; in a yeast factory the eight-hour day was introduced; the railway workshops were closed by order of the ministry; other departments continued partial strikes for their demands.

In Nikolaev, the general strike broke out under the immediate influence of news from Odessa, Baku, Batum and Tiflis, in spite of the opposition of the social democratic committee who wanted to postpone the outbreak of the movement till the time came when the military should have left the town for manoeuvres. The masses refused to hold back; one factory made a beginning, the strikes went from one workshop to another, the resistance of the military only poured oil on the fire. Mass processions with revolutionary songs were formed in which all workers, employees, tramways officials, men and women took part. The cessation of work was complete. In Ekaterinoslav, the bakers came out on strike on August 5, on the seventh the men in the railway workshops, and then all the other factories on August 8. Tramway traffic stopped, and the newspapers did not appear.

Thus, the colossal general strike in south Russia came into being in the summer of 1903. By many small channels of partial economic struggles and little “accidental” occurrences it flowed rapidly to a raging sea, and changed the entire south of the czarist empire for some weeks into a bizarre revolutionary workers’ republic. “Brotherly embraces, cries of delight and of enthusiasm, songs of freedom, merry laughter, humour and joy were seen and heard in the crowd of many thousands of persons which surged through the town from morning till evening. The mood was exalted; one could almost believe that a new, better life was beginning on the earth. A most solemn and at the same time an idyllic, moving spectacle.” ... So wrote at the time the correspondent of the Liberal *Osvobozhdenye* of Peter Struve.

The year 1904 brought with it war, and for a time, an interval of quiet in the mass strike movement. At first a troubled wave of “patriotic” demonstrations arranged by the police authorities spread over the country. The “liberal” bourgeois society was for the time being struck to the ground by the czarist official chauvinism. But soon the social democrats took possession of the arena; revolutionary workers’ demonstrations were opposed to the demonstrations of the patriotic lumpenproletariat, which were organised under police patronage. At last, the shameful defeats of the czarist army woke the liberal society from its lethargy; then began the era of democratic congresses, banquets, speeches, addresses and manifestos. Absolutism, temporarily suppressed through the disgrace of the war, gave full scope to these gentlemen, and by and by they saw everything in rosy colours. For six months bourgeois liberalism occupied the centre of the stage and the proletariat remained in the shadows. But after a long depression, absolutism again roused itself, the camarilla gathered all its strength and by a single, powerful movement of the Cossack’s heel the whole liberal movement was driven into a corner. Banquets, speeches, and congresses were prohibited out of hand as “intolerable presumption,” and liberalism suddenly found itself at the end of its tether.

But exactly at the point where liberalism was exhausted, the action of the proletariat began. In December 1904 the great general strike due to unemployment broke out in Baku; the working-class was again on the field of battle. As speech was forbidden and rendered impossible, action began. In Baku for some weeks in the midst of the general strike the social democrats ruled as absolute

masters of the situation; and the peculiar events of December in the Caucasus would have caused an immediate sensation if they had not been so quickly put in the shade by the rising tide of the revolution. The fantastic confused news of the general strike in Baku had not reached all parts of the czarist empire when in January 1905; the mass strike in St. Petersburg broke out.

Here also, as is well known, the immediate cause was trivial. Two men employed at the Putilov works were discharged on account of their membership in the legal Zubatovian union. This measure called forth a solidarity strike on January 16 of the whole of the 12,000 employed in this works. The social democrats seized the occasion of the strike to begin a lively agitation for the extension of the demands and set forth demands for the eight-hour day, the right of combination, freedom of speech and of the press, etc. The unrest among the Putilov workers communicated itself quickly to the remainder of the proletariat, and in a few days 140,000 workers were on strike. Joint conferences and stormy discussions led to the working out of that proletarian charter of bourgeois freedom with the eight-hour day at its head with which, on January 22nd, 200,000 workers led by Father Gapon, marched to the Tsar's palace. The conflict of the two Putilov workers who had been subjected to disciplinary punishment had changed within a week into the prologue of the most violent revolution in modern times.

The events that followed upon this are well known, the bloodbath in St. Petersburg called forth gigantic mass strikes and general strike in the month of January, and February in all the industrial centres and towns in Russia, Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic Provinces, the Caucasus, Siberia, from north to south and east to west. On closer inspection, however, it can be seen that the mass strike was appearing in other forms than those of the previous period. Everywhere at that time the social democratic organisations went before with appeals; everywhere was revolutionary solidarity with the St. Petersburg proletariat expressly stated as the cause and aim of the general strike; everywhere, at the same time, there were demonstrations, speeches, conflicts with the military.

But even here there was no predetermined plan, no organised action, because the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep pace with the spontaneous risings of the masses; the leaders had scarcely time to formulate the watchwords of the onrushing crowd of the proletariat. Further, the earlier mass and general strikes had originated from individual coalescing wage struggles which, in the general temper of the revolutionary situation and under the influence of the social democratic agitation, rapidly became political demonstrations; the economic factor and the scattered condition of trade unionism were the starting point; all-embracing class action and political direction the result. The movement was now reversed.

The general strikes of January and February broke out as unified revolutionary actions to begin with under the direction of the social democrats; but this action soon fell into an unending series of local, partial, economic strikes in separate districts, towns, departments and factories. Throughout the whole of the spring of 1905 and into the middle of the summer there fermented throughout the whole of the immense empire an uninterrupted economic strike of almost the entire proletariat against capital – a struggle which caught, on the one hand, all the petty bourgeois and liberal professions, commercial employees, technicians, actors and members of artistic professions – and on the other hand, penetrated to the domestic servants, the minor police officials and even to the stratum of the lumpenproletariat, and simultaneously surged from the towns to the country districts and even knocked at the iron gates of the military barracks.

This is a gigantic, many-coloured picture of a general arrangement of labour and capital which reflects all the complexity of social organisation and of the political consciousness of every section and of every district; and the whole long scale runs from the regular trade-union struggle of a picked and tested troop of the proletariat drawn from large-scale industry, to the formless protest

of a handful of rural proletarians, and to the first slight stirrings of an agitated military garrison, from the well-educated and elegant revolt in cuffs and white collars in the counting house of a bank to the shy-bold murmurings of a clumsy meeting of dissatisfied policemen in a smoke-grimed dark and dirty guardroom.

According to the theory of the lovers of “orderly and well-disciplined” struggles, according to plan and scheme, according to those especially who always ought to know better from afar “how it should have been done,” the decay of the great political general strike of January 1905 into a number of economic struggles was probably “a great mistake” which crippled that action and changed it into a “straw fire.” But social democracy in Russia, which had taken part in the revolution but had not “made” it, and which had even to learn its law from its course itself, was at the first glance put out of countenance for a time by the apparently fruitless ebb of the storm-flood of the general strike. History, however, which had made that “great mistake,” thereby accomplished, heedless of the reasonings of its officious schoolmaster, a gigantic work for the revolution which was as inevitable as it was, in its consequences, incalculable.

The sudden general rising of the proletariat in January under the powerful impetus of the St. Petersburg events was outwardly a political act of the revolutionary declaration of war on absolutism. But this first general direct action reacted inwardly all the more powerfully as it for the first time awoke class feeling and class-consciousness in millions upon millions as if by an electric shock. And this awakening of class feeling expressed itself forthwith in the circumstances that the proletarian mass, counted by millions, quite suddenly and sharply came to realise how intolerable was that social and economic existence which they had patiently endured for decades in the chains of capitalism. Thereupon, there began a spontaneous general shaking of and tugging at these chains. All the innumerable sufferings of the modern proletariat reminded them of the old bleeding wounds. Here was the eight-hour day fought for, there piece-work was resisted, here were brutal foremen “driven off” in a sack on a handcar, at another place infamous systems of fines were fought against, everywhere better wages were striven for and here and there the abolition of homework. Backward, degraded occupations in large towns, small provincial towns, which had hitherto dreamed in an idyllic sleep, the village with its legacy from feudalism – all these, suddenly awakened by the January lightning, bethought themselves of their rights and now sought feverishly to make up for their previous neglect.

Here, the economic struggle was not really a decay, a dissipation of action, but merely change of front, a sudden and natural alteration of the first general engagement with absolutism, in a general reckoning with capital, which in keeping with its character assumed the form of individual, scattered wage struggles. Political class action was not broken in January by the decay of the general strike into economic strikes, but the reverse, after the possible content of political action in the given situation and at the given stage of the revolution was exhausted, it broke, or rather changed, into economic action.

In point of fact, what more could the general strike in January have achieved? Only complete thoughtlessness could expect that absolutism could be destroyed at one blow by a single “long-drawn” general strike after the anarchist plan. Absolutism in Russia must be overthrown by the proletariat. But in order to be able to overthrow it, the proletariat requires a high degree of political education, of class-consciousness and organisation. All these conditions cannot be fulfilled by pamphlets and leaflets, but only by the living political school, by the fight and in the fight, in the continuous course of the revolution. Further, absolutism cannot be overthrown at any desired moment in which only adequate “exertion” and “endurance” is necessary. The fall of absolutism is merely the outer expression of the inner social and class development of Russian society.

Before absolutism can, and so far that it may, be overthrown, the bourgeois Russia in its interior, in its modern class divisions, must be formed. That requires the drawing together of the various social layers and interests, besides the education of the proletarian revolutionary parties, and not less of the liberal, radical petty bourgeois, conservative and reactionary parties; it requires self-consciousness, self-knowledge and the class-consciousness not merely of the layers of the people, but also of the layers of the bourgeoisie. But this also can be achieved and come to fruition in no way but in the struggle, in the process of revolution itself, through the actual school of experience, in collision with the proletariat as well as with one another, in incessant mutual friction. This class division and class maturity of bourgeois society, as well as its action in the struggle against absolutism, is on the one hand, hampered and made difficult by the peculiar leading role of the proletariat and, on the other hand, is spurred on and accelerated. The various undercurrents of the social process of the revolution cross one another, check one another, and increase the internal contradictions of the revolution, but in the end accelerate and thereby render still more violent its eruptions.

This apparently simple and purely mechanical problem may therefore be stated thus: the overthrow of absolutism is a long, continuous social process, and its solution demands a complete undermining of the soil of society; the uppermost part be placed lowest and the lowermost part highest, the apparent "order" must be changed to a chaos, and the apparently "anarchistic" chaos must be changed into a new order. Now is this process of the social transformation of old Russia, not only the January lightning of the first general strike, but also the spring and summer thunderstorms that followed it, played an indispensable part. The embittered general relations of wage labour and capital contributed in equal measure to the drawing together of the various layers of the people and those of the bourgeoisie, to the class-consciousness of the revolutionary proletariat and to that of the liberal and conservative bourgeoisie. And just as the urban wage struggle contributed to the formation of a strong monarchist industrial party in Moscow, so the conflagration of the violent rural rising in Livonia led to the rapid liquidation of the famous aristocratic-agrarian zemstvo liberalism.

But at the same time, the period of the economic struggles of the spring and summer of 1905 made it possible for the urban proletariat, by means of active social democratic agitation and direction, to assimilate later all the lessons of the January prologue and to grasp clearly all the further tasks of the revolution. There was connected with this too, another circumstance of an enduring social character: *a general raising of the standard of life of the proletariat*, economic, social and intellectual.

The January strikes of 1905 ended victoriously almost throughout. As proof of this some date from the enormous, and still for the most part, inaccessible mass of material may be cited here relating to a few of the most important strikes carried through in Warsaw alone by the social democrats of Poland and Lithuania. In the great factories of the metal industry of Warsaw: Lilpos Ltd.; Ran and Lowenstein; Rudzki and Co.; Borman, Schwede and Co.' Handtke, Gerlach and Pulst; Geisler Bros.; Eberherd, Wolski and Co.; Konrad and Yanruszkiewicz Ltd.; Weber and Daehu; Ewizdzinski and Co.; Wolonski Wire Works; Gostynski and Co., Ltd.; Rrun and Son; Frage Norblin; Werner; Buch; Kenneberg Bros.; Labour; Dittunar Lamp Factory; Serkowski; Weszk – twenty-two factories in all, the workers won after a strike of four to five weeks (from January 24-26) a nine-hour day, a 25 per cent increase of wages and obtained various smaller concessions. In the large workshops of the timber industry of Warsaw, namely Karmanski, Damiaki, Gromel, Szerbinkik, Twemerowski, Horn, Devensee, Tworkowski, Daab and Martens – twelve workshops in all – the strikes had won by the twenty-third of February the nine-hour day, which they also won, together

with an increase in wages, after a further strike of a week.

The entire bricklaying industry began a strike on February 27 and demanded, in conformity with the watchword of social democracy, the eight-hour day; they won the ten-hour day on March 11 together with an increase of wages for all categories, regular weekly payment of wages, etc. The painters, the cartwrights, the saddlers and the smiths all won the eight-hour day without decrease of wages.

The telephone workshops struck for ten days and won the eight-hour day and an increase of wages of 10 to 15 per cent. The large linen-weaving establishment of Hiele and Dietrich (10,000 workers) after a strike lasting nine weeks, obtained a decrease of the working day by one hour and a wage increase of 5 to 10 per cent. And similar results in endless variation were to be seen in the older branches of industry in Warsaw, Lodz, and Sosnovitz.

In Russia proper the eight-hour day was won in December 1904 by a few categories of oil workers in Baku; in May 1905 by the sugar workers of the Kiev district; in January 1905 all the printing works in Samara (where at the same time an increase of piecework rates was obtained and fines were abolished); in February in the factory in which medical instruments for the army are manufactured, in a furniture factory and in the cartridge factory in St. Petersburg. Further, the eight-hour day was introduced in the mines at Vladivostock, in March in the government mechanical workshops dealing with government stock and in May among the employees of the Tiflis electric town railway. In the same month a working day of eight-and-a-half hours was introduced in the large cotton-weaving factory of Marosov (and at the same time the abolition of night work and a wage increase of 8 per cent were won); in June an eight-hour day in a few oil works in St. Petersburg and Moscow; in July a working day of eight-and-a-half hours among the smiths at the St. Petersburg docks; and in November in all the private printing establishments of the town of Orel (and at the same time an increase of times rates of 20 per cent and piecework rates of 100 per cent, as well as the setting up of a conciliation board on which workers and employers were equally represented).

The nine-hour day in all the railway workshops (in February), in many government, military and naval workshops, in most of the factories of the town of Berdiansk, in all the printing works of the towns of Poltava and Munsck; nine-and-a-half hours in the shipyards, mechanical workshops and foundries in the town of Niolaev, in June, after a general strike of waiters in Warsaw, in many restaurants and cafes (and at the same time a wage increase of 20 to 40 per cent, with a two-week holiday in the year).

The ten-hour day in almost all the factories of the towns of Lodz, Sosnovitz, Riga, Kovno, Oval, Dorfat, Minsk, Kharkov, in the bakeries of Odessa, among the mechanics in Kishinev, at a few smelting works in St. Petersburg, in the match factories of Kovno (with an increase of wages of 10 per cent), in all the government marine workshops, and amongst all the dockers.

The wage increases were, in general, smaller than the shortening of hours but always more significant: in Warsaw in the middle of March 1905 a general increase of wages of 15 per cent was fixed by the municipal factories department; in the centre of the textile industry, Ivanovo Vosnesensk, the wage increase amounted to 7 to 15 per cent, in Kovno the increase affected 73 per cent of the workers. A fixed minimum wage was introduced in some of the bakeries in Odessa, in the Neva shipbuilding yards in St. Petersburg, etc.

It goes without saying that these concessions were withdrawn again, now here and now there. This however was only the cause of renewed strife and led to still more bitter struggles for revenge, and thus the strike period of the spring of 1905 has of itself become the prologue to an endless series of ever-spreading and interlacing economic struggles which have lasted to the present day. In the period of the outward stagnation of the revolution, when the telegraph carried no sensational

news from the Russian theatre of war to the outside world, and when the west European laid aside his newspaper in disappointment with the remark there “was nothing doing” in Russia, the great underground work of the revolution was in reality being carried on without cessation, day-by-day and hour-by-hour, in the very heart of the empire. The incessant intensive economic struggle effected, by rapid and abbreviated methods, the transition of capitalism from the stage of primitive accumulation, of patriarchal unmethodical methods of working, to a highly modern, civilised one.

At the present time the actual working day in Russian industry leaves behind, not only the Russian factory legislation (that is the legal working day of eleven hours) but even the actual conditions of Germany. In most departments of large-scale industry in Russia the ten-hour day prevails, which in Germany is declared in social legislation to be an unattainable goal. And what is more, that longed-for “industrial constitutionalism,” for which there is so much enthusiasm in Germany, and for the sake of which the advocates of opportunist tactics would keep ever keen wind from the stagnant waters of their all-suffering parliamentarism, has already been born, together with political “constitutionalism,” in the midst of the revolutionary storm, from the revolution itself! In actual fact it is not merely a general raising of the standard of life, or the cultural level of the working-class that has taken place. The material standard of life as a permanent stage of well-being has no place in the revolution. Full of contradictions and contrasts it brings simultaneously on the part of the capitalists; today the eight-hour day and tomorrow wholesale lockouts and actual starvation for the millions.

The most precious, lasting, thing in the rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat, which proceeds by fits and starts, and which offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle. And not only that. Even the relations of the worker to the employer are turned round; since the January general strike and the strikes of 1905 which followed upon it, the principle of the capitalist “mastery of the house” is de facto abolished. In the larger factories of all important industrial centres the establishment of workers’ committees has, as if by itself, taken place, with which alone the employer negotiates and which decide all disputes.

And finally another thing, the apparently “chaotic” strikes and the “disorganised” revolutionary action after the January general strike are becoming the starting point of a feverish *work of organisation*. Dame History, from afar, smilingly hoaxes the bureaucratic lay figures who keep grim watch at the gate over the fate of the German trade unions. The firm organisations which, as the indispensable hypothesis for an eventual German mass strike, should be fortified like an impregnable citadel – these organisations are in Russia, on the contrary, already born from the mass strike. And while the guardians of the German trade unions for the most part fear that the organisations will fall in pieces in a revolutionary whirlwind like rare porcelain, the Russian revolution shows us the exact opposite picture; from the whirlwind and the storm, out of the fire and glow of the mass strike and the street fighting rise again, like Venus from the foam, fresh, young, powerful, buoyant trade unions.

Here again a little example, which, however, is typical of the whole empire. At the second conference of the Russian trade unions which took place at the end of February 1906 in St. Petersburg, the representative of the Petersburg trade unions, in his report on the development of trade-union organisations, of the czarist capital said:

January 22, 1905, which washed away the Gapon union, was a turning point. The workers in large numbers have learned by experience to appreciate and understand the importance of organisation, and that only they themselves can create these organisations. The first trade union – that of the printers – originated in direct connection with

the January movement. The commission appointed to work out the tariffs framed the statutes, and on July 19 the union began its existence. Just about this time the union of office-workers and bookkeepers was called into existence.

In addition to those organisations, which extend almost openly, there arose from January to October 1905 semi-legal and illegal trade unions. To the former belonged, for example, the union of chemists' assistants and commercial employees. Amongst the illegal unions special attention must be drawn to the watchmakers' union, whose first secret session was held on April 24th. All attempts to convene a general open meeting were shattered on the obstinate resistance of the police and the employers in the form of the Chamber of Commerce. This mischance has not prevented the existence of the union. The tailors and tailoresses union was founded in 1905 at a meeting in a wood at which seventy tailors were present. After the question of forming the union was discussed a commission was appointed which was entrusted with the task of working out the statutes. All attempts of the commission to obtain a legal existence for the union were unsuccessful. Its activities were confined to agitation and the enrolling of new members in the individual workshops. A similar fate was in store for the shoemakers' union. In July, a secret night meeting was convened in a wood near the city. Over 100 shoemakers attended; a report was read on the importance of trade unionism, on its history in Western Europe and its tasks in Russia. It was then decided to form a trade union; a commission of twelve was appointed to work out the statutes and call a general meeting of shoemakers. The statutes were drawn up, but in the meantime it had not been found possible to print them nor had the general meeting been convened.

These were the first difficult beginnings. Then came the October days, the second general strike, the czar's manifesto of October 30 and the brief "constitution period." The workers threw themselves with fiery zeal into the waves of political freedom in order to use it forthwith for the purpose of the work of organisation. Besides daily political meetings, debates and the formation of clubs, the development of trade unionism was immediately taken in hand. In October and November *forty* new trade unions appeared in St. Petersburg. Presently a "central bureau," that is, a trade-union council, was established, various trade-union papers appeared, and since November a central organ has also been published, *The Trade Union*.

What was reported above concerning Petersburg was also true on the whole of Moscow and Odessa, Kiev and Nikolaev, Saratov and Voronezh, Samara and Nizhni Novgorod, and all the larger towns of Russia, and to a still higher degree in Poland. The trade unions of different towns seek contact with one another and conferences are held. The end of the "constitution period," and the return to reaction in December 1905 put a stop for the time being to the open widespread activity of the trade unions, but did not, however, altogether extinguish them. They operate as organisations in secret and occasionally carry on quite open wage struggles. A peculiar mixture of the legal and illegal condition of trade-union life is being built up, corresponding to the highly contradictory revolutionary situation.

But in the midst of the struggle the work of organisation is being more widely extended, in a thoroughgoing, not to say pedantic fashion. The trade-unions of the social democracy of Poland and Lithuania, for example, which at the last congress (in July 1906) were represented by five delegates from a membership of 10,000 are furnished with the usual statutes, printed membership cards, adhesive stamps, etc. And the same bankers and shoemakers, engineers and printers of Warsaw and Lodz who in June 1905 stood on the barricades and in December only awaited the word from

Petersburg to begin street fighting, find time and are eager, between one mass strike and another, between prison and lockout, and under the conditions of a siege, to go into their trade-union statutes and discuss them earnestly. These barricade fighters of yesterday and tomorrow have indeed more than once at meetings severely reprimanded their leaders and threatened them with withdrawal from the party because the unlucky trade-union membership cards could not be printed quickly enough – in secret printing works under incessant police persecution. This zeal and this earnestness continue to this day. For example, in the first two weeks of July 1906 fifteen new trade unions appeared in Ekaterinoslav, six in Kostroma, several in Kiev, Poltava, Smolensk, Cherkassy, Proskurvo, down to the most insignificant provincial towns.

In the session of the Moscow trade-union council of June 4 this year, after the acceptance of the reports of individual trade-union delegates, it was decided “that the trade-unions should discipline their members and restrain from street rioting because the time is not considered opportune for the mass strike. In the face of possible provocation on the part of the government, care should be taken that the masses do not stream out in the streets.” Finally, the council decided that if at any time one trade-union began a strike the others should hold back from any wages movement. Most of the economic struggles are now directed by the trade-unions.

Thus the great economic struggle which proceeded from the January general strike, and which has not ceased to the present day, has formed a broad background of the revolution from which, in ceaseless reciprocal action with the political agitation and the external events of the revolution, there ever arise here and there now isolated explosions, and now great sections of the proletariat. Thus there flame up against this background the following events one after the other; at the May Day demonstration there was an unprecedented, absolute general strike in Warsaw which ended in a bloody encounter between the defenceless crowd and the soldiers. At Lodz in June a mass outing, which was scattered by the soldiers, led to a demonstration of 100,000 workers at the funeral of some of the victims of the brutal soldiery and to a renewed encounter with the military, and finally, on June 23, 24 and 25, passed into the first barricade fight in the czarist empire. Similarly in June the first great revolt of the sailors of the Black Sea Fleet exploded in the harbour of Odessa from a trifling incident on board the armoured vessel *Potemkin* which reacted immediately on Odessa and Nikolaev in the form of a violent mass strike. As a further echo followed the mass strike and the sailors’ revolts in Kronstadt, Libau and Vladivostok.

In the month of October the grandiose experiment of St. Petersburg was made with the introduction of the eight-hour day. The general council of workers delegates decided to achieve the eight-hour day in a revolutionary manner. That means that on the appointed day all the workers of Petersburg should inform their employers that they are not willing to work more than eight hours a day, and should leave their places of work at the end of eight hours. The idea was the occasion of lively agitation, was accepted by the proletariat with enthusiasm and carried out, but very great sacrifices were not thereby avoided. Thus for example, the eight-hour day meant an enormous fall in wages for the textile workers who had hitherto worked eleven hours and that on a system of piecework. This, however, they willingly accepted. *Within a week the eight-hour day prevailed in every factory and workshop in Petersburg*, and the joy of the workers knew no bounds. Soon, however, the employers, stupefied at first, prepared their defences; everywhere they threatened to close their factories. Some of the workers consented to negotiate and obtained here a working day for ten hours and there was one of nine hours. The elite of the Petersburg proletariat, however, the workers in the large government engineering establishments, remained unshaken, and a lockout ensued which threw from forty-five to fifty thousand men on the streets for a month. At the settlement the eight-hour day movement was carried into the general strike of December which the great lockout

had hampered to a great extent.

Meanwhile, however, the second tremendous general strike throughout the whole empire follows in October as a reply to the project of the Bulygin Duma – the strike to which the railwaymen gave the summons. This second great action of the proletariat already bears a character essentially different from that of the first one in January. The element of political consciousness already plays a much bigger role. Here also, to be sure, the immediate occasion for the outbreak of the mass strike was a subordinate and apparently accidental thing: the conflict of the railwaymen with the management over the pension fund. But the general rising of the industrial proletariat which followed upon it was conducted in accordance with clear political ideas. The prologue of the January strike was a procession to the czar to ask for political freedom: the watchword of the October strike ran away with the constitutional comedy of czarism!

And thanks to the immediate success of the general strike, to the czar's manifesto of October 30, the movement does not flow back on itself, as in January but rushes over outwardly in the eager activity of newly acquired political freedom. Demonstrations, meetings, a young press, public discussions and bloody massacres as the end of the story, and thereupon new mass strikes and demonstrations – such is the stormy picture of the November and December days. In November, all the instance of the social democrats in Petersburg the first demonstrative mass strike is arranged as a protest demonstration against the bloody deeds and proclamation of a state of siege in Poland and Livonia.

The fermentation after the brief constitutional period and the gruesome awakening finally leads in December to the outbreak of the third general mass strike throughout the empire. This time its course and its outcome are altogether different from those in the two earlier cases. Political action does not change into economic action as in January, but it no longer achieves a rapid victory as in October. The attempts of the czarist camarilla with real political freedom are no longer made, and revolutionary action therewith, for the first time, and along its whole length, knocked against the strong wall of the physical violence of absolutism. By the logical internal development of progressive experience the mass strike this time changes into an open insurrection, to armed barricades, and street fighting in Moscow. The December days in Moscow close the first eventful year of the revolution as the highest point in the ascending line of political action and of the mass strike movement.

The Moscow events show a typical picture of the logical development and at the same time of the future of the revolutionary movement on the whole: their inevitable close in a general open insurrection, which again on its part cannot come in any other way than through the school of a series of preparatory partial insurrections, which end in partial outward "defeats" and, considered individually, may appear to be "premature."

The year 1906 brings the elections to the Duma and the Duma incidents. The proletariat, from a strong revolutionary instinct and clear knowledge of the situation, boycotts the whole czarist constitutional farce, and liberalism again occupies the centre stage for a few months. The situation of 1904 appears to have come again, a period of speeches instead of acts, and the proletariat for a time walk in the shadow in order to devote themselves the more diligently to the trade-union struggle and the work of the organisation. The mass strikes are no longer spoken of, while the clattering rockets of liberal rhetoric are fired off day after day. At last, the iron curtain is torn down, the actors are dispersed, and nothing remains of the liberal rockets but smoke and vapour. An attempt of the Central Committee of the Russian social democracy to call forth a mass strike, as a demonstration for the Duma and the reopening of the period of liberal speechmaking, falls absolutely flat. The role of the political mass strike alone is exhausted, but, at the same time,

the transition of the mass strike into a general popular rising is not yet accomplished. The liberal episode is past, the proletarian episode is not yet begun. The stage remains empty for the time being.

IV. The Interaction of the Political and the Economic Struggle

We have attempted in the foregoing to sketch the history of the mass strike in Russia in a few strokes. Even a fleeting glance at this history shows us a picture which in no way resembles that usually formed by discussions in Germany on the mass strike. Instead of the rigid and hollow scheme of an arid political action carried out by the decision of the highest committees and furnished with a plan and panorama, we see a bit of pulsating life of flesh and blood, which cannot be cut out of the large frame of the revolution but is connected with all parts of the revolution by a thousand veins.

The mass strike, as the Russian Revolution shows it to us, is such a changeable phenomenon that it reflects all the phases of the political and economic struggle, all stages and factors of the revolution. Its adaptability, its efficiency, the factors of its origin are constantly changing. It suddenly opens new and wide perspectives of the revolution when it appears to have already arrived in a narrow pass and where it is impossible for anyone to reckon upon it with any degree of certainty. It flows now like a broad billow over the whole kingdom, and now divides into a gigantic network of narrow streams; now it bubbles forth from under the ground like a fresh spring and now is completely lost under the earth. Political and economic strikes, mass strikes and partial strikes, demonstrative strikes and fighting strikes, general strikes of individual branches of industry and general strikes in individual towns, peaceful wage struggles and street massacres, barricade fighting – all these run through one another, run side by side, cross one another, flow in and over one another – it is a ceaselessly moving, changing sea of phenomena. And the law of motion of these phenomena is clear: it does not lie in the mass strike itself nor in its technical details, but in the political and social proportions of the forces of the revolution.

The mass strike is merely the form of the revolutionary struggle and every disarrangement of the relations of the contending powers, in party development and in class division, in the position of counter-revolution – all this immediately influences the action of the strike in a thousand invisible and scarcely controllable ways. But strike action itself does not cease for a single moment. It merely alters its forms, its dimensions, its effect. It is the living pulse-beat of the revolution and at the same time its most powerful driving wheel. In a word, the mass strike, as shown to us in the Russian Revolution, is not a crafty method discovered by subtle reasoning for the purpose of making the proletarian struggle more effective, *but the method of motion of the proletarian mass*, the phenomenal form of the proletarian struggle in the revolution.

Some general aspects may now be examined which may assist us in forming a correct estimate of the problem of the mass strike:

1. It is absurd to think of the mass strike as one act, one isolated action. The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades. Of the innumerable and highly varied mass strikes which have taken place in Russia during the last four years, the scheme of the mass strike was a purely political movement, begun and ended after a cut and dried plan, a short single act of one variety only and, at that, a subordinate variety – pure demonstration strike. In the whole course of the five-year period we see in Russia only a few demonstration strikes, which be it noted, were generally confined to single towns. Thus the annual May Day general strike in Warsaw and Lodz. In Russia proper on the first

of May has not yet been celebrated to any appreciable extent by abstention from work; the mass strike in Warsaw on September 11, 1905, as a memorial service in honour of the executed Martin Kasprzak; that of November 1905 in Petersburg as protest demonstrations against the declaration of the state of siege in Poland and Livonia; that of January 22, 1906 in Warsaw, Lodz, Czestochon and in Dombrowa coal basin, as well as, in part those in a few Russian towns as anniversary celebrations of the Petersburg bloodbath; in addition, in July 1906 a general strike in Tiflis as demonstration of sympathy with soldiers sentenced by court-martial on account of the military revolt; and finally from the same cause, in September 1906, during the deliberations of the court-martial in Reval. All the above great and partial mass strikes and general strikes were not demonstration strikes but fighting strikes, and as such they originated, for the most part, spontaneously, in every case from specific local accidental causes, without plan or design, and grew with elemental power into great movements, and then they did not begin an "orderly retreat," but turned now into economic struggles, now into street fighting, and now collapsed of themselves.

In this general picture the purely political demonstration strike plays quite a subordinate role – isolated small points in the midst of a mighty expanse. Thereby, temporarily considered, the following characteristic discloses itself: the demonstration strikes which, in contradistinction to the fighting strikes, exhibit the greatest mass of party discipline, conscious direction and political thought, and therefore must appear as the highest and most mature form of the mass strike, play in reality the greatest part in the *beginnings* of the movement. Thus, for example, the absolute cessation of work on May 1, 1905, in Warsaw, as the first instance of a decision of the social democrats carried throughout in such an astonishing fashion, was an experience of great importance for the proletarian movement in Poland. In the same way the sympathetic strike of the same year in Petersburg made a great impression as the first experiment of conscious systematic mass action in Russia. Similarly the "trial mass strike" of the Hamburg comrades on January 17, 1906, will play a prominent part in the history of the future German mass strike as the first vigorous attempt with the much disputed weapon, and also a very successful and convincingly striking test of the fighting temper and the lust for battle of the Hamburg working class. And just as surely will the period of the mass strike in Germany, when it has once begun in real earnest, lead of itself to a real, general cessation of work on May first. The May Day festival may naturally be raised to a position of honour as the first great demonstration under the aegis of the mass struggle. In this sense the "lame horse," as the May Day festival was termed at the trade-union congress at Cologne, has still a great future before it and an important part to play, in the proletarian class struggle in Germany.

But with the development of the earnest revolutionary struggle the importance of such demonstrations diminishes rapidly. It is precisely those factors which objectively facilitate the realisation of the demonstration strike after a preconceived plan and at the party's word of command – namely, the growth of political consciousness and the training of the proletariat – make this kind of mass strike impossible; today the proletariat in Russia, the most capable vanguard of the masses, does not want to know about mass strikes; the workers are no longer in a mood for jesting and will now think only of a serious struggle with all its consequences. And when, in the first great mass strike in January 1905, the demonstrative element, not indeed in an intentional, but more in an instinctive, spontaneous form, still played a great part, on the other hand, the attempt of the Central Committee of the Russian social democrats to call a mass strike in August as a demonstration for the dissolved Duma was shattered by, among other things, the positive disinclination of the educated proletariat to engage in weak half-actions and mere demonstrations.

2. When, however, we have in view the less important strike of the demonstrative kind, instead of the fighting strike as it represents in Russia today the actual vehicle of proletarian action, we

see still more clearly that it is impossible to separate the economic factors from one another. Here also the reality deviates from the theoretical scheme, and the pedantic representation in which the pure political mass strike is logically derived from the trade-union general strike as the ripest and highest stage, but at the same time is kept distinct from it, is shown to be absolutely false. This is expressed not merely in the fact that the mass strike from that first great wage struggle of the Petersburg textile workers in 1896-97 to the last great mass strike in December 1905, passed imperceptibly from the economic field to the political, so that it is almost impossible to draw a dividing line between them.

Again, every one of the great mass strikes repeats, so to speak, on a small scale, the entire history of the Russian mass strike, and begins with a pure economic, or at all events, a partial trade-union conflict, and runs through all the stages to the political demonstration. The great thunderstorm of mass strikes in South Russia in 1902 and 1903 originated, as we have seen, in Baku from a conflict arising from the disciplinary punishment of the unemployed, in Rostov from disputes about wages in the railway workshops, in Tiflis from a struggle of the commercial employees for reduction of working hours, in Odessa from a wage dispute in a single small factory. The January mass strike of 1905 developed from an internal conflict in the Putilov works, the October strike from the struggle of the railway workers for a pension fund, and finally the December strike from the struggle of the postal and telegraph employees for the right of combination. The progress of the movement on the whole is not expressed in the circumstances that the economic initial stage is omitted, but much more in the rapidity with which all the stages to the political demonstration are run through and in the extremity of the point to which the strike moves forward.

But the movement on the whole does not proceed from the economic to the political struggle, nor even the reverse. Every great political mass action, after it has attained its political highest point, breaks up into a mass of economic strikes. And that applies not only to each of the great mass strikes, but also to the revolution as a whole. With the spreading, clarifying and involution of the political struggle, the economic struggle not only does not recede, but extends, organises and becomes involved in equal measure. Between the two there is the most complete reciprocal action.

Every new onset and every fresh victory of the political struggle is transformed into a powerful impetus for the economic struggle, extending at the same time its external possibilities and intensifying the inner urge of the workers to better their position and their desire to struggle. After every foaming wave of political action a fructifying deposit remains behind from which a thousand stalks of economic struggle shoot forth. And conversely. The workers' condition of ceaseless economic struggle with the capitalists keeps their fighting energy alive in every political interval; it forms, so to speak, the permanent fresh reservoir of the strength of the proletarian classes, from which the political fight ever renews its strength, and at the same time leads the indefatigable economic sappers of the proletariat at all times, now here and now there, to isolated sharp conflicts, out of which public conflicts on a large scale unexpectedly explode.

In a word: the economic struggle is the transmitter from one political centre to another; the political struggle is the periodic fertilisation of the soil for the economic struggle. Cause and effect here continually change places; and thus the economic and the political factor in the period of the mass strike, now widely removed, completely separated or even mutually exclusive, as the theoretical plan would have them, merely form the two interlacing sides of the proletarian class struggle in Russia. And *their unity* is precisely the mass strike. If the sophisticated theory proposes to make a clever logical dissection of the mass strike for the purpose of getting at the "purely political mass strike," it will by this dissection, as with any other, not perceive the phenomenon in its living essence, but will kill it altogether.

3. Finally, the events in Russia show us that the mass strike is inseparable from the revolution. The history of the Russian mass strike is the history of the Russian Revolution. When, to be sure, the representatives of our German opportunism hear of "revolution," they immediately think of bloodshed, street fighting or powder and shot, and the logical conclusion thereof is: the mass strike leads inevitably to the revolution, therefore we dare not have it. In actual fact we see in Russia that almost every mass strike in the long run leads to an encounter with the armed guardians of czarist order, and therein the so-called political strikes exactly resemble the larger economic struggle. The revolution, however, is something other and something more than bloodshed. In contradiction to the police interpretation, which views the revolution exclusively from the standpoint of street disturbances and rioting, that is, from the standpoint of "disorder," the interpretation of scientific socialism sees in the revolution above all a thorough-going internal reversal of social class relations. And from this standpoint an altogether different connection exists between revolution and mass strike in Russia from that contained in the commonplace conception that the mass strike generally ends in bloodshed.

We have seen above the inner mechanism of the Russian mass strike which depends upon the ceaseless reciprocal action of the political and economic struggles. But this reciprocal action is conditioned during the revolutionary period. Only in the sultry air of the period of revolution can any partial little conflict between labour and capital grow into a general explosion. In Germany the most violent, most brutal collisions between the workers and employers take place every year and every day without the struggle overleaping the bounds of the individual departments or individual towns concerned, or even those of the individual factories. Punishment of organised workers in Petersburg and unemployment as in Baku, wage struggles as in Odessa, struggles for the right of combination as in Moscow are the order of the day in Germany. No single one of these cases however changes suddenly into a common class action. And when they grow into isolated mass strikes, which have without question a political colouring, they do not bring about a general storm. The general strike of Dutch railwaymen, which died away in spite of the warmest sympathy, in the midst of the complete impassivity of the proletariat of the country, affords a striking proof of this.

And conversely, only in the period of revolution, when the social foundations and the walls of the class society are shaken and subjected to a constant process of disarrangement, any political class action of the proletariat can arouse from their passive condition in a few hours whole sections of the working class who have hitherto remained unaffected, and this is immediately and naturally expressed in a stormy economic struggle. The worker, suddenly aroused to activity by the electric shock of political action, immediately seizes the weapon lying nearest his hand for the fight against his condition of economic slavery: the stormy gesture of the political struggle causes him to feel with unexpected intensity the weight and the pressure of his economic chains. And while, for example, the most violent political struggle in Germany – the electoral struggle or the parliamentary struggle on the customs tariff – exercised a scarcely perceptible direct influence upon the course and the intensity of the wage struggles being conducted at the same time in Germany, every political action of the proletariat in Russia immediately expresses itself in the extension of the area and the deepening of the intensity of the economic struggle.

The revolution thus first creates the social conditions in which this sudden change of the economic struggle into the political and of the political struggle into the economic is possible, a change which finds its expression in the mass strike. And if the vulgar scheme sees the connection between mass strike and revolution only in bloody street encounters with which the mass strikes conclude, a somewhat deeper look into the Russian events shows an exactly opposite connection: in reality the mass strike does not produce the revolution but the revolution produces the mass strike.

4. It is sufficient in order to comprehend the foregoing to obtain an explanation of the question of the conscious direction and initiative in the mass strike. If the mass strike is not an isolated act but a whole period of the class struggle, and if this period is identical with a period of revolution, it is clear that the mass strike cannot be called at will, even when the decision to do so may come from the highest committee of the strongest social democratic party. As long as the social democracy has not the power to stage and countermand revolutions according to its fancy, even the greatest enthusiasm and impatience of the social democratic troops will not suffice to call into being a real period of mass strike as a living, powerful movement of the people. On the basis of a decision of the party leadership and of party discipline, a single short demonstration may well be arranged similar to the Swedish mass strike, or to the latest Austrian strike, or even to the Hamburg mass strike of January 17. These demonstrations, however, differ from an actual period of revolutionary mass strikes in exactly the same way that the well-known demonstrations in foreign ports during a period of strained diplomatic relations differ from a naval war. A mass strike born of pure discipline and enthusiasm will, at best, merely play the role of an episode, of a symptom of the fighting mood of working class upon which, however, the conditions of a peaceful period are reflected.

Of course, even during the revolution, mass strikes do not exactly fall from heaven. They must be brought about in some way or another by the workers. The resolution and determination of the workers also play a part and indeed the initiative and the wider direction naturally fall to the share of the organised and most enlightened kernel of the proletariat. But the scope of this initiative and this direction, for the most part, is confined to application to individual acts, to individual strikes, when the revolutionary period is already begun, and indeed, in most cases, is confined within the boundaries of a single town. Thus, for example, as we have seen, the social democrats have already, on several occasions, successfully issued a direct summons for a mass strike in Baku, in Warsaw, in Lodz, and in Petersburg. But this succeeds much less frequently when applied to general movements of the whole proletariat.

Further, there are quite definite limits set to initiative and conscious direction. During the revolution it is extremely difficult for any directing organ of the proletarian movement to foresee and to calculate which occasions and factors can lead to explosions and which cannot. Here also initiative and direction do not consist in issuing commands according to one's inclinations, but in the most adroit adaptability to the given situation, and the closest possible contact with the mood of the masses. The element of spontaneity, as we have seen, plays a great part in all Russian mass strikes without exception, be it as a driving force or as a restraining influence. This does not occur in Russia, however, because social democracy is still young or weak, but because in every individual act of the struggle so very many important economic, political and social, general and local, material and psychical, factors react upon one another in such a way that no single act can be arranged and resolved as if it were a mathematical problem. The revolution, even when the proletariat, with the social democrats at their head, appear in the leading role, is not a manoeuvre of the proletariat in the open field, but a fight in the midst of the incessant crashing, displacing and crumbling of the social foundation. In short, in the mass strikes in Russia the element of spontaneity plays such a predominant part, not because the Russian proletariat are "uneducated," but because revolutions do not allow anyone to play the schoolmaster with them.

On the other hand, we see in Russia that the same revolution which rendered the social democrats' command of the mass strike so difficult, and which struck the conductor's baton from, or pressed into, their hand at all times in such a comical fashion – we see that it resolved of itself all those difficulties of the mass strike which, in the theoretical scheme of German discussion are regarded as the chief concern of the "directing body": the question of "provisioning," "discovery of

cost,” and “sacrifice.” It goes without saying that it does not resolve them in the way that they would be resolved in a quiet confidential discussion between the higher directing committees of the labour movement, the members sitting pencil in hand. The “regulation” of all these questions consists in the circumstance that the revolution brings such an enormous mass of people upon the stage that any computation or regulation of the cost of the movement such as can be effected in a civil process, appears to be an altogether hopeless undertaking.

The leading organisations in Russia certainly attempt to support the direct victims to the best of their ability. Thus, for example, the brave victims of the gigantic lockout in St. Petersburg, which followed upon the eight-hour day campaign, were supported for weeks. But all these measures are, in the enormous balance of the revolution, but as a drop in the ocean. At the moment that a real, earnest period of mass strikes begins, all these “calculations” of “cost” become merely projects for exhausting the ocean with a tumbler. And it is a veritable ocean of frightful privations and sufferings which is brought by every revolution to the proletarian masses. And the solution which a revolutionary period makes of this apparently invincible difficulty consists in the circumstances that such an immense volume of mass idealism is simultaneously released that the masses are insensible to the bitterest sufferings. With the psychology of a trade unionist who will not stay off his work on May Day unless he is assured in advance of a definite amount of support in the event of his being victimised, neither revolution nor mass strike can be made. But in the storm of the revolutionary period even the proletarian is transformed from a provident paterfamilias demanding support, into a “revolutionary romanticist,” for whom even the highest good, life itself, to say nothing of material well-being, possesses but little in comparison with the ideals of the struggle.

If, however, the direction of the mass strike in the sense of command over its origin, and in the sense of the calculating and reckoning of the cost, is a matter of the revolutionary period itself, the directing of the mass strike becomes, in an altogether different sense, the duty of social democracy and its leading organs. Instead of puzzling their heads with the technical side, with the mechanism, of the mass strike, the social democrats are called upon to assume *political* leadership in the midst of the revolutionary period.

To give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at its every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat which is already released and active, will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the social democrats are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness and that they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it – that is the most important task of the directing body in a period of mass strikes. And this direction changes of itself, to a certain extent, into technical direction. A consistent, resolute, progressive tactic on the part of the social democrats produces in the masses a feeling of security, self-confidence and desire for struggle; a vacillating weak tactic, based on an underestimation of the proletariat, has a crippling and confusing effect upon the masses. In the first case mass strikes break out “of themselves” and “opportunistly”; in the second case they remain ineffective amidst direct summonses of the directing body to mass strikes. And of both the Russian Revolution affords striking examples.

3.2 Anton Pannekoek, Marxist Theory and Revolutionary Tactics (1912)

1. Our Differences

For several years past, profound tactical disagreement has been developing on a succession of issues amongst those who had previously shared common ground as Marxists and together fought against Revisionism in the name of the radical tactic of class struggle. It first came into the open in 1910, in the debate between Kautsky and Luxemburg over the mass strike; then came the dissension over imperialism and the question of disarmament; and finally, with the conflict over the electoral deal made by the Party Executive and the attitude to be adopted towards the liberals, the most important issues of parliamentary politics became the subject of dispute.

One may regret this fact, but no party loyalty can conjure it away; we can only throw *light* upon it, and this is what the interest of the party demands. On the one hand, the causes of the dissension must be identified, in order to show that it is natural and necessary; and on the other, the content of the two perspectives, their most basic principles and their most far-reaching implications, must be extracted from the formulations of the two sides, so that party comrades can orientate themselves and choose between them; this is only possible through theoretical discussion.

The source of the recent tactical disagreements is clear to see: under the influence of the modern forms of capitalism, new forms of action have developed in the labour movement, namely mass action. When they first made their appearance, they were welcomed by all Marxists and hailed as a sign of revolutionary development, a product of our revolutionary tactics. But as the practical potential of mass action developed, it began to pose new problems; the question of social revolution, hitherto an unattainably distant ultimate goal, now became a live issue for the militant proletariat, and the tremendous difficulties involved became clear to everyone, almost as a matter of personal experience. This gave rise to two trends of thought: the one took up the problem of revolution, and by analysing the effectiveness, significance and potential of the new forms of action, sought to grasp how the proletariat would be able to fulfil its mission; the other, as if shrinking before the magnitude of this prospect, groped among the older, parliamentary forms of action in search of tendencies which would for the time being make it possible to postpone tackling the task. The new methods of the labour movement have given rise to an ideological split among those who previously advocated radical Marxist party-tactics.

In these circumstances it is our duty as Marxists to clarify the differences as far as possible by means of theoretical discussion. This is why, in our article "Mass action and revolution", we outlined the process of revolutionary development as a reversal of the relations of class power to provide a basic statement of our perspective, and attempted to clarify the differences between our views and those of Kautsky in a critique of two articles by him. In his reply, Kautsky shifted the issue on to a different terrain: instead of contesting the validity of theoretical formulations, he accused us of wanting to force new tactics upon the party. In the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of 9 September, we showed that this turned the whole purpose of our argument on its head.

We had attempted, insofar as it was possible, to clarify the distinctions between the *three* tendencies, two radical and one Revisionist, which now confront each other in the party. Comrade Kautsky seems to have missed the point of this entire analysis, since he remarks testily: "Pannekoek sees my thinking as pure Revisionism."

What we were arguing was on the contrary that Kautsky's position is not Revisionist. For the very reason that many comrades misjudged Kautsky because they were preoccupied with the radical-

Revisionist dichotomy of previous debates, and wondered if he was gradually turning Revisionist – for this very reason it was necessary to speak out and grasp Kautsky’s practice in terms of the particular nature of his radical position. Whereas Revisionism seeks to limit our activity to parliamentary and trade-union campaigns, to the achievement of reforms and improvements which will evolve naturally into socialism – a perspective which serves as the basis for reformist tactics aimed solely at short-term gains – radicalism stresses the inevitability of the revolutionary struggle for the conquest of power that lies before us, and therefore directs its tactics towards raising class consciousness and increasing the power of the proletariat. It is over the nature of this revolution that our views diverge. As far as Kautsky is concerned, it is an event in the future, a political apocalypse, and all we have to do meanwhile is prepare for the final show-down by gathering our strength and assembling and drilling our troops. In our view, revolution is a *process*, the first stages of which we are now experiencing, for it is only by the struggle for power itself that the masses can be assembled, drilled and formed into an organisation capable of taking power. These different conceptions lead to completely different evaluations of current practice; and it is apparent that the Revisionists’ rejection of any revolutionary action and Kautsky’s postponement of it to the indefinite future are bound to unite them on many of the current issues over which they both oppose us.

This is not of course to say that these currents form distinct, conscious groups in the party: to some extent they are no more than conflicting trends of thought. Nor does it mean a blurring of the distinction between Kautskian radicalism and Revisionism, merely a rapprochement which will nevertheless become more and more pronounced as the inner logic of development asserts itself, for radicalism that is real and yet passive cannot but lose its mass base. Necessary as it was to keep to traditional methods of struggle in the period when the movement was first developing, the time was bound to come when the proletariat would aspire to transform its heightened awareness of its own potential into the conquest of decisive new positions of strength. The mass actions in the struggle for suffrage in Prussia testify to this determination. Revisionism was itself an expression of this aspiration to achieve positive results as the fruit of growing power; and despite the disappointments and failures it has brought, it owes its influence primarily to the notions that radical party-tactics simply mean waiting passively without making definite gains and that Marxism is a doctrine of fatalism. The proletariat cannot rest from the struggle for fresh advances; those who are not prepared to lead this struggle on a revolutionary course will, whatever their intentions, be inexorably pushed further and further along the reformist path of pursuing positive gains by means of particular parliamentary tactics and bargains with other parties.

...

3. The Organisation

In our article in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, we maintained that Kautsky had without justification taken our emphasis on the essential importance of the spirit of organisation to mean that we consider the organisation itself unnecessary. What we had said was that irrespective of all assaults upon the external forms of association, the masses in which this spirit dwells will always regroup themselves in new organisations; and if, in contrast to the view he expressed at the Dresden party congress in 1903, Kautsky now expects the state to refrain from attacking the workers’ organisations, this optimism can only be based upon the spirit of organisation which he so scorns.

The spirit of organisation is in fact the active principle which alone endows the framework of organisation with life and energy. But this immortal soul cannot float ethereally in the kingdom of heaven like that of Christian theology; it continually recreates an organisational form for itself,

because it brings together the men in whom it lives for the purpose of joint, organised action. This spirit is not something abstract or imaginary by contrast with the prevailing form of association, the “concrete” organisation, but is *just as concrete and real* as the latter. It binds the individual persons which make up the organisation more closely together than any rules or statutes can do, so that they no longer scatter as disparate atoms when the external bond of rules and statutes is severed. If organisations are able to develop and take action as powerful, stable, united bodies, if neither joining battle nor breaking off the engagement, neither struggle nor defeat can crack their solidarity, if all their members see it as the most natural thing in the world to put the common interest before their own individual interest, they do not do so because of the rights and obligations entailed in the statutes, nor because of the magic power of the organisation’s funds or its democratic constitution: the reason for all this lies in the proletariat’s sense of organisation, the profound transformation that its character has undergone. What Kautsky has to say about the powers which the organisation has at its disposal is all very well: the quality of the arms which the proletariat forges for itself gives it self-confidence and a sense of its own capabilities, and there is no disagreement between us as to the need for the workers to equip themselves as well as possible with powerful centralised associations that have adequate funds at their disposal. But the virtue of this machinery is *dependent* upon the readiness of the members to sacrifice themselves, upon their discipline within the organisation, upon their solidarity towards their comrades, in short, upon the fact that they have become completely different persons from the old individualistic petty-bourgeois and peasants. If Kautsky sees this new character, this spirit of organisation, as a product of organisation, then in the first place there need be no conflict between this view and our own, and in the second place it is only half correct; for this transformation of human nature in the proletariat is primarily the effect of the conditions under which the workers live, trained as they are to act collectively by the shared experience of exploitation in the same factory, and secondarily a *product of class struggle*, that is to say militant action on the part of the organisation; it would be difficult to argue that such activities as electing committees and counting subscriptions make much contribution in this respect.

It immediately becomes clear what constitutes the essence of proletarian organisation if we consider exactly what distinguishes a trade union from a whist club, a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals or an employers’ association. Kautsky obviously does not do so, and sees no difference of principle between them; hence he puts the “yellow associations”, which employers compel their workers to join, on a par with the organisations of the militant proletariat. He does not recognise the world-transforming significance of the proletarian organisation. He feels able to accuse us of disdain for the organisation: in reality he values it far less than we do. What distinguishes the workers’ organisations from all others is the development of solidarity within them as the basis of their power, the total subordination of the individual to the community, the essence of a new humanity still in the process of formation. The proletarian organisation brings unity to the masses, previously fragmented and powerless, moulding them into an entity with a conscious purpose and with power in its own right. It lays the foundations of a humanity which governs itself, decides its own destiny, and as the first step in that direction, throws off alien oppression. In it there grows up the only agency which can abolish the class hegemony of exploitation; the development of the proletarian organisation in itself signifies the repudiation of all the functions of class rule; it represents the self-created order of the people, and it will fight relentlessly to throw back and put an end to the brutal intervention and despotic attempts at repression which the ruling minority undertakes. It is within the proletarian organisation that the new humanity grows, a humanity now developing into a coherent entity for the first time in the history of the world; production is developing into a unified world economy, and the sense of belonging together is concurrently

growing between men, the firm solidarity and fraternity which bind them together as one organism ruled by a single will.

As far as Kautsky is concerned, the organisation consists only in the “real, concrete” association or club formed by the workers for some practical goal in their own interests and held together only by the external bonds of rules and statutes, just like an employers’ association or a grocers’ mutual-aid society. If this external bond is broken, the whole thing fragments into so many isolated individuals and the organisation disappears. It is understandable that a conception of this kind leads Kautsky to paint the external dangers threatening the organisation in such sombre colours and warn so energetically against injudicious “trials of strength” which bring demoralisation, mass desertion and the collapse of the organisation in their train. At this level of generalisation there can be no objection to his warnings: nobody wants injudicious trials of strength. Nor are the unfortunate consequences of a defeat a fantasy on his part; they correspond to the experience of a young labour movement. When the workers first discover organisation, they expect great things of it, and enter into battle full of enthusiasm; but if the contest is lost, they often turn their backs upon the organisation in despondency and discouragement, because they regard it only from the direct, practical perspective, as an association bringing immediate benefits, and the new spirit has yet to take firm root in them. But what a different picture greets us in the mature labour movement that is setting its stamp ever more distinctly upon the most advanced countries! Again and again we see with what tenacity the workers stick to their organisations, we see how neither defeat nor the most vicious terrorism from the upper classes can induce them to abandon the organisation. They see in the organisation not merely a society formed for purposes of convenience, they feel rather that it is their only strength, their only recourse, that without the organisation they are powerless and defenceless, and this consciousness rules their every action as despotically as an instinct of self-preservation.

This is not yet true of all workers, of course, but it is the direction in which they are developing; this new character is growing stronger and stronger in the proletariat. And the dangers painted so black by Kautsky are therefore becoming of increasingly little moment. Certainly the struggle has its dangers, but it is nevertheless the organisation’s element, the only environment in which it can grow and develop internal strength. We know of no strategy that can bring only victories and no defeats; however cautious we may be, setbacks and defeats can only be completely avoided by quitting the field without a fight, and this would in most cases be worse than a defeat. We must be prepared for our advances to be only too often brought to a halt by defeat, with no way of avoiding battle. When well-meaning leaders hold forth on the serious consequences of defeat, the workers are therefore able to retort: “Do you think that we, for whom the organisation has become flesh and blood, who know and feel that the organisation is more to us than our very lives – for it represents the life and future of our class – that simply because of a defeat we shall straightway lose confidence in the organisation and run off? Certainly, a whole section of the masses who flooded to us in attack and victory will drift away again when we suffer a reverse; but this only means that we can count on wider support for our actions than the steadily growing phalanx of our unflinching fighting battalions.”

This contrast between Kautsky’s views and our own also makes it clear how it is that we differ so sharply in our evaluation of the organisation even though we share the same theoretical matrix. *It is simply that our perspectives correspond to different stages in the development of the organisation, Kautsky’s to the organisation in its first flowering, ours to a more mature level of development.* This is why he considers the external form of organisation to be what is essential and believes that the whole organisation is lost if this form suffers. This is why he takes the transformation of the

proletarian character to be the consequence of organisation, rather than its essence. This is why he sees the main characterological effect of organisation upon the worker in the confidence and self-restraint brought by the material resources of the collectivity – in other words, the funds. This is why he warns that the workers will turn their backs upon the organisation in demoralisation if it suffers a major defeat. All this corresponds to the conception one would derive from observing the organisation in its initial stages of development. The arguments that he puts against us do, therefore, have a basis in reality; but we claim a *greater* justification for our perspective in that it belongs to the new reality irresistibly unfolding – and let us not forget that Germany has only had powerful proletarian organisations for a decade! It therefore reflects the sentiments of the young generation of workers that has evolved over the last ten years. The old ideas still apply, of course, but to a decreasing extent; Kautsky’s conceptions express the primitive, immature moments in the organisation, still a force to be reckoned with, but an inhibiting, retarding one. It will be revealed by practice what relationship these different forces bear towards each other, in the decisions and acts by which the proletarian masses show what they deem themselves capable of.

4. The Conquest of Power

...

Kautsky [makes] a sharp distinction between day-to-day actions, which are only demonstrations and can be called at will, and the unforeseeable revolutionary events of the future. New rights may occasionally be won in the day-to-day struggle; these are in no sense steps towards the conquest of power, otherwise the ruling class would put up resistance to them which could only be overcome by political strikes. Governments friendly to the workers may alternate with governments hostile to them, street demonstrations and mass strikes may play some part in the process, but for all that, nothing essential will change; our struggle remains “a political struggle against governments” restricting itself to “opposition” and leaving the power of the state and its ministries intact. Until one day, when external events trigger off a massive popular uprising with street riots and political strikes that puts an end to this whole business.

It is only possible to maintain such a perspective by restricting one’s observation to external political forms and ignoring the political reality behind them. Analysis of the balance of power between the classes in conflict as one rises and the other declines is the only key to understanding revolutionary development. This transcends the sharp distinction between day-to-day action and revolution. The various forms of action mentioned by Kautsky *are not polar opposites, but part of a gradually differentiated range*, weak and powerful forms of action within the same category. *Firstly, in terms of how they develop*: even straightforward demonstrations cannot be called at will, but are only possible when strong feeling has been aroused by external causes, such as the rising cost of living and the danger of war today or the conditions of suffrage in Prussia in 1910. The stronger the feeling aroused, the more vigorously the protests can develop. What Kautsky has to say about the most powerful form of mass strike, namely that we should “give it the most energetic support and use it to strengthen the proletariat”, does not go far enough for cases where this situation has already generated a mass movement; when conditions permit, the party, as the conscious bearer of the exploited masses’ deepest sensibilities, *must instigate such action as is necessary and take over leadership of the movement* – in other words, play the same role in events of major significance as it does today on a smaller scale. The precipitating factors cannot be foreseen, but it is we who act upon them. *Secondly, in terms of those taking part*: we cannot restrict our present demonstrations solely to party members; although these at first form the nucleus, others will come to us in the

course of the struggle. In our last article we showed that the circle of those involved grows as the campaign develops, until it takes in the broad masses of the people; there is never any question of unruly street riots in the old sense. *Thirdly, in terms of the effects such action has:* the conquest of power by means of the most potent forms of action basically amounts to liquidating the powers of coercion available to the enemy and building up our own strength; but even today's protests, our simple street demonstrations, display this effect on a small scale. When the police had to abandon their attempts to prevent demonstrations in sheer impotence in 1910, that was a first sign of the state's coercive powers beginning to crumble away; and the content of revolution consists in the total destruction of these powers. In this sense, that instance of mass action can be seen as the beginning of the German revolution.

The contrast between our respective views as set out here may at first sight appear to be purely theoretical; but it nevertheless has great practical significance with respect to the tactics we adopt. As Kautsky sees it, each time the opportunity for vigorous action arises we must stop and consider whether it might not lead to a "trial of strength", an attempt to make the revolution, that is, by mobilising the entire strength of our adversary against us. And because it is accepted that we are too weak to undertake this, it will be only too easy to shrink from any action – this was the burden of the debate on the mass strike in *Die Neue Zeit* in 1910. Those who reject Kautsky's dichotomy between day-to-day action and revolution, however, assess every action as an immediate issue, to be evaluated in terms of the prevailing conditions and the mood of the masses, and at the same time, as part of a great purpose. In each campaign one presses as far ahead as seems possible in the conditions obtaining, without allowing oneself to be hamstrung by specious theoretical considerations projected into the future; for the issue is never one of total revolution, nor of a victory with significance only for the present, but always of a step further along the path of revolution.

...

6. Marxism and the Role of the Party

In conclusion, a few more words on theory. These are necessary because Kautsky hints from time to time that our work takes leave of the materialist conception of history, the basis of Marxism. In one place he describes our conception of the nature of organisation as spiritualism ill befitting a materialist. On another occasion he takes our view that the proletariat must develop its power and freedom "in constant attack and advance", in a class struggle escalating from one engagement to another, to mean that the party executive is to "instigate" *the revolution*.

Marxism explains all the historical and political actions of men in terms of their material relations, and in particular their economic relations. A recurrent bourgeois misconception accuses us of ignoring the role of the human mind in this, and making man a dead instrument, a puppet of economic forces. We insist in turn that Marxism does not eliminate the mind. Everything which motivates the actions of men does so through the mind. Their actions are determined by their will, and by all the ideals, principles and motives that exist in the mind. But Marxism maintains that the content of the human mind is nothing other than a product of the material world in which man lives, and that economic relations therefore only determine his actions by their effects upon his mind and influence upon his will. Social revolution only succeeds the development of capitalism because the economic upheaval first transforms the mind of the proletariat, endowing it with a new content and directing the will in this sense. Just as Social-Democratic activity is the expression of a new perspective and new determination instilling themselves in the mind of the proletariat, so

organisation is an expression and consequence of a profound mental transformation in the proletariat. This mental transformation is the term of mediation by which economic development leads to the act of social revolution. There can surely be no disagreement between Kautsky and ourselves that this is the role which Marxism attributes to the mind.

And yet even in this connection our views differ; not in the sphere of abstract, theoretical formulation, but in our practical emphasis. It is only when taken together that the two statements “The actions of men are entirely determined by their material relations” and “Men must make their history themselves through their own actions” constitute the Marxist view as a whole. The first rules out the arbitrary notion that a revolution can be made at will; the second eliminates the fatalism that would have us simply wait until the revolution happens of its own accord through some perfect fruition of development. While both maxims are correct in theoretical terms, they necessarily receive different degrees of emphasis in the course of historical development. When the party is first flourishing and must before all else organise the proletariat, seeing its own development as the primary aim of its activity, the truth embodied in the first maxim gives it the patience for the slow process of construction, the sense that the time of premature putsches is past and the calm certainty of eventual victory. Marxism takes on a predominantly historico-economic character in this period; it is the theory that all history is economically determined, and drums into us the realisation that we must wait for conditions to mature. But the more the proletariat organises itself into a mass movement capable of forceful intervention in social life, the more it is bound to develop a sense of the second maxim. The awareness now grows that the point is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it. Marxism now becomes the *theory of proletarian action*. The questions of how precisely the proletariat’s spirit and will develop under the influence of social conditions and how the various influences shape it now come into the foreground; interest in the philosophical side of Marxism and in the nature of the mind now comes to life. Two Marxists influenced by these different stages will therefore express themselves differently, the one primarily emphasising the determinate nature of the mind, the other its active role; they will both lead their respective truths into battle against each other, although they both pay homage to the same Marxian theory.

From the practical point of view, however, this disagreement takes on another light. We entirely agree with Kautsky that an individual or group cannot make the revolution. Equally, Kautsky will agree with us that the proletariat must make the revolution. But how do matters stand with the party, which is a middle term, on the one hand a large group which consciously decides what action it will take, and on the other the representative and leader of the entire proletariat? *What is the function of the party?*

With respect to revolution, Kautsky puts it as follows in his exposition of his tactics: “Utilisation of the political general strike, but only in occasional, extreme instances when the masses can no longer be restrained.” Thus, the party is to hold back the masses for as long as they can be held back; so long as it is in any way possible, it should regard its function as to keep the masses placid, to restrain them from taking action; only when this is no longer possible, when popular indignation is threatening to burst all constraint, does it open the flood-gates and if possible put itself at the head of the masses. The roles are thus distributed in such a way that all the energy, all the initiative in which revolution has its origins must come from the masses, while the party’s function is to hold this activity back, inhibit it, contain it for as long as possible. But the relationship cannot be conceived in this way. Certainly, all the energy comes from the masses, whose revolutionary potential is aroused by oppression, misery and anarchy, and who by their revolt must then abolish the hegemony of capital. But the party has taught them that desperate outbursts on the part of individuals or individual groups are pointless, and that success can only be achieved through

collective, united, organised action. It has disciplined the masses and restrained them from frittering away their revolutionary activity fruitlessly. But this, of course, is only the one, negative side of the party's function; it must simultaneously show in positive terms how these energies can be set to work in a different, productive manner, and lead the way in doing so. The masses have, so to speak, made over part of their energy, their revolutionary purpose, to the organised collectivity, not so that it shall be dissipated, but so that the party can put it to use as their collective will. *The initiative and potential for spontaneous action which the masses surrender by doing so is not in fact lost, but re-appears elsewhere and in another form as the party's initiative and potential for spontaneous action*; a transformation of energy takes place, as it were. Even when the fiercest indignation flares up among the masses – over the rising cost of living, for example – they remain calm, for they rely upon the party calling upon them to act in such a way that their energy will be utilised in the most appropriate and most successful manner possible.

The relationship between masses and party cannot therefore be as Kautsky has presented it. If the party saw its function as restraining the masses from action for as long as it could do so, then party discipline would mean a loss to the masses of their initiative and potential for spontaneous action, a *real* loss, and not a transformation of energy. *The existence of the party would then reduce the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat rather than increase it*. It cannot simply sit down and wait until the masses rise up spontaneously in spite of having entrusted it with part of their autonomy; the discipline and confidence in the party leadership which keep the masses calm place it under an obligation to intervene actively and itself give the masses the call for action at the right moment. Thus, as we have already argued, the party actually has a duty to *instigate* revolutionary action, because it is the bearer of an important part of the masses' capacity for action; but it *cannot do so as and when it pleases*, for it has not assimilated the entire will of the entire proletariat, and cannot therefore order it about like a troop of soldiers. It must wait for the right moment: not until the masses will wait no longer and are rising up of their own accord, but until the conditions arouse such feeling in the masses that large-scale action by the masses has a chance of success. This is the way in which the Marxist doctrine is realised that although men are determined and impelled by economic development, they make their own history. The revolutionary potential of the indignation aroused in the masses by the intolerable nature of capitalism must not go untapped and hence be lost; nor must it be frittered away in unorganised outbursts, but made fit for organised use in action instigated by the party with the objective of weakening the hegemony of capital. It is in these revolutionary tactics that Marxist theory will become reality.

Week 4

Betrayals of 1914

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 allowed the socialist parties of Europe to put their internationalism, anti-imperialism and proletarian solidarity to the test. Unfortunately, it was a test that they sorely failed, as one by one each socialist party lined up to support its respective nation's war effort.

Rosa Luxemburg in *The Junius Pamphlet* condemns the SPD, etc. for their betrayals of socialism. She continues on to analyze what the war portends for the international socialist movement. (*Note: The Marxists Internet Archive version has footnotes which explain some of the obscure references Luxemburg makes in this piece.*)

Disgusted with the nationalist tendencies of the socialist parties, a small group of Left socialists traveled to Zimmerwald, Switzerland in 1915 to stake out a political position they thought worthy of socialism. From this conference the *Zimmerwald Manifesto* emerged. This statement, however, was not radical enough for some of the delegation – among them the Russian Bolshevik Vladimir Lenin – thus they collaborated on the *Draft Resolution of the Leftwing Delegates* and the *Declaration of the Left Wing*.

The Eley chapter for this week is 7.

4.1 Rosa Luxemburg, The Junius Pamphlet (1915)

Chapter 1

The scene has changed fundamentally. The six weeks' march to Paris has grown into a world drama. Mass slaughter has become the tiresome and monotonous business of the day and the end is no closer. Bourgeois statecraft is held fast in its own vise. The spirits summoned up can no longer be exorcised.

Gone is the euphoria. Gone the patriotic noise in the streets, the chase after the gold-colored automobile, one false telegram after another, the wells poisoned by cholera, the Russian students heaving bombs over every railway bridge in Berlin, the French airplanes over Nuremberg, the spy hunting public running amok in the streets, the swaying crowds in the coffee shops with ear-deafening patriotic songs surging ever higher, whole city neighborhoods transformed into mobs ready to denounce, to mistreat women, to shout hurrah and to induce delirium in themselves by means of wild rumors. Gone, too, is the atmosphere of ritual murder, the Kishinev air where the

crossing guard is the only remaining representative of human dignity.

The spectacle is over. German scholars, those “stumbling lemurs,” have been whistled off the stage long ago. The trains full of reservists are no longer accompanied by virgins fainting from pure jubilation. They no longer greet the people from the windows of the train with joyous smiles. Carrying their packs, they quietly trot along the streets where the public goes about its daily business with aggrieved visages.

In the prosaic atmosphere of pale day there sounds a different chorus – the hoarse cries of the vulture and the hyenas of the battlefield. Ten thousand tarpaulins guaranteed up to regulations! A hundred thousand kilos of bacon, cocoa powder, coffee-substitute – c.o.d, immediate delivery! Hand grenades, lathes, cartridge pouches, marriage bureaus for widows of the fallen, leather belts, jobbers for war orders – serious offers only! The cannon fodder loaded onto trains in August and September is moldering in the killing fields of Belgium, the Vosges, and Masurian Lakes where the profits are springing up like weeds. It’s a question of getting the harvest into the barn quickly. Across the ocean stretch thousands of greedy hands to snatch it up.

Business thrives in the ruins. Cities become piles of ruins; villages become cemeteries; countries, deserts; populations are beggared; churches, horse stalls. International law, treaties and alliances, the most sacred words and the highest authority have been torn in shreds. Every sovereign “by the grace of God” is called a rogue and lying scoundrel by his cousin on the other side. Every diplomat is a cunning rascal to his colleagues in the other party. Every government sees every other as dooming its own people and worthy only of universal contempt. There are food riots in Venice, in Lisbon, Moscow, Singapore. There is plague in Russia, and misery and despair everywhere.

Violated, dishonored, wading in blood, dripping filth – there stands bourgeois society. This is it [in reality]. Not all spic and span and moral, with pretense to culture, philosophy, ethics, order, peace, and the rule of law – but the ravening beast, the witches’ sabbath of anarchy, a plague to culture and humanity. Thus it reveals itself in its true, its naked form.

In the midst of this witches’ sabbath a catastrophe of world-historical proportions has happened: International Social Democracy has capitulated. To deceive ourselves about it, to cover it up, would be the most foolish, the most fatal thing the proletariat could do. Marx says: “...the democrat (that is, the petty bourgeois revolutionary) [comes] out of the most shameful defeats as unmarked as he naively went into them; he comes away with the newly gained conviction that he must be victorious, not that he or his party ought to give up the old principles, but that conditions ought to accommodate him.” The modern proletariat comes out of historical tests differently. Its tasks and its errors are both gigantic: no prescription, no schema valid for every case, no infallible leader to show it the path to follow. Historical experience is its only school mistress. Its thorny way to self-emancipation is paved not only with immeasurable suffering but also with countless errors. The aim of its journey – its emancipation depends on this – is whether the proletariat can learn from its own errors. Self-criticism, remorseless, cruel, and going to the core of things is the life’s breath and light of the proletarian movement. The fall of the socialist proletariat in the present world war is unprecedented. It is a misfortune for humanity. But socialism will be lost only if the international proletariat fails to measure the depth of this fall, if it refuses to learn from it.

The last forty-five year period in the development of the modern labor movement now stands in doubt. What we are experiencing in this critique is a closing of accounts for what will soon be half a century of work at our posts. The grave of the Paris Commune ended the first phase of the European labor movement as well as the First International. Since then there began a new phase. In place of spontaneous revolutions, risings, and barricades, after which the proletariat each time fell back into passivity, there began the systematic daily struggle, the exploitation of bourgeois

parliamentarianism, mass organizations, the marriage of the economic with the political struggle, and that of socialist ideals with stubborn defense of immediate daily interests. For the first time the polestar of strict scientific teachings lit the way for the proletariat and for its emancipation. Instead of sects, schools, utopias, and isolated experiments in various countries, there arose a uniform, international theoretical basis which bound countries together like the strands of a rope. Marxist knowledge gave the working class of the entire world a compass by which it can make sense of the welter of daily events and by which it can always plot the right course to take to the fixed and final goal.

She who bore, championed, and protected this new method was German Social Democracy. The [Franco-Prussian] War and the defeat of the Paris Commune had shifted the center of gravity for the European workers' movement to Germany. As France was the classic site of the first phase of proletarian class struggle and Paris the beating, bleeding heart of the European laboring classes of those times, so the German workers became the vanguard of the second phase. By means of countless sacrifices and tireless attention to detail, they have built the strongest organization, the one most worthy of emulation; they created the biggest press, called the most effective means of education and enlightenment into being, gathered the most powerful masses of voters and attained the greatest number of parliamentary mandates. German Social Democracy was considered the purest embodiment of Marxist socialism. She had and laid claim to a special place in the Second International – its instructress and leader.

In his famous 1895 foreword to Marx's *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850*, Friedrich Engels wrote:

No matter what happens in other countries, German Social Democracy has a special position and therefore a special task, at least for the time being. The two million voters it sends to the ballot box, and the young men and women who, although non-voters, stand behind them, constitute the most numerous and compact mass, the “decisive force” of the proletarian army.

German Social Democracy, as the Vienna *Arbeiterzeitung* wrote on August 5, 1914, was “the jewel of class-conscious proletarian organizations.” In her footsteps trod the increasingly enthusiastic Social Democrats of France, Italy, and Belgium, the labor movements of Holland, Scandinavia, Switzerland, and the United States. The Slavic countries, the Russians, the Social Democrats of the Balkans looked upon [German Social Democracy] with limitless, nearly uncritical, admiration. In the Second International the German “decisive force” played the determining role. At the [international] congresses, in the meetings of the international socialist bureaus, all awaited the opinion of the Germans. Especially in the questions of the struggle against militarism and war, German Social Democracy always took the lead. “For us Germans that is unacceptable” regularly sufficed to decide the orientation of the Second International, which blindly bestowed its confidence upon the admired leadership of the mighty German Social Democracy: the pride of every socialist and the terror of the ruling classes everywhere.

And what did we in Germany experience when the great historical test came? The most precipitous fall, the most violent collapse. Nowhere has the organization of the proletariat been yoked so completely to the service of imperialism. Nowhere is the state of siege borne so docilely. Nowhere is the press so hobbled, public opinion so stifled, the economic and political class struggle of the working class so totally surrendered as in Germany.

But German Social Democracy was not merely the strongest vanguard troop, it was the thinking head of the International. For this reason, we must begin the analysis, the self-examination process,

with its fall. It has the duty to begin the salvation of international socialism, that means unsparing criticism of itself. None of the other parties, none of the other classes of bourgeois society, may look clearly and openly into the mirror of their own errors, their own weaknesses, for the mirror reflects their historical limitations and the historical doom that awaits them. The working class can boldly look truth straight in the face, even the bitterest self-renunciation, for its weaknesses are only confusion. The strict law of history gives back its power, stands guarantee for its final victory.

Unsparing self-criticism is not merely an essential for its existence but the working class's supreme duty. On our ship we have the most valuable treasures of mankind, and the proletariat is their ordained guardian! And while bourgeois society, shamed and dishonored by the bloody orgy, rushes headlong toward its doom, the international proletariat must and will gather up the golden treasure that, in a moment of weakness and confusion in the chaos of the world war, it has allowed to sink to the ground.

One thing is certain. The world war is a turning point. It is foolish and mad to imagine that we need only survive the war, like a rabbit waiting out the storm under a bush, in order to fall happily back into the old routine once it is over. The world war has altered the conditions of our struggle and, most of all, it has changed us. Not that the basic law of capitalist development, the life-and-death war between capital and labor, will experience any amelioration. But now, in the midst of the war, the masks are falling and the old familiar visages smirk at us. The tempo of development has received a mighty jolt from the eruption of the volcano of imperialism. The violence of the conflicts in the bosom of society, the enormosity of the tasks that tower up before the socialist proletariat – these make everything that has transpired in the history of the workers' movement seem a pleasant idyll.

Historically, this war was ordained to thrust forward the cause of the proletariat ... It was ordained to drive the German proletariat to the pinnacle of the nation and thereby begin to organize the international and universal conflict between capital and labor for political power within the state.

And did we envision a different role for the working class in the world war? Let us recall how we, only a short while ago, were accustomed to describe the future:

Then comes the *catastrophe*. Then the great mobilization will take place in Europe; 16-18 million men, the flower of the various nations, armed with the best tools of death, will enter the field as enemies. But, I am convinced, that behind the great mobilization there stands the *great havoc*. It will not come through our agency, but rather yours. You are driving things to the limit. You are leading us to catastrophe. You will reap what you have sown. The *Götterdämmerung* of the bourgeois world approaches. Believe it! It is approaching! [All italics are Luxemburg's.]

Thus spoke our leader, [August] Bebel, during the Reichstag debate on the Morocco Crisis.

Imperialism or Socialism?, the official party pamphlet distributed in hundreds of thousands of copies a few years ago, closes with these words:

Thus the struggle against imperialism develops ever more into the decisive struggle between capital and labor. War crises, rising prices, capitalism vs. peace, welfare for all, socialism! Thus is the question stated. *History is moving toward great decisions*. The proletariat must work unceasingly at its world-historical task, strengthen its organization, the clarity of its understanding. Then come what may, be it that [proletarian] power spares mankind the terrible cruelty of a world war, *or be it that the capitalist*

world sinks into history in the same way as it was born, in blood and violence. [In either case] the historical hour will find the working class prepared – and preparation is everything. [All italics are Luxemburg's.]

The official *Handbook for Social-Democratic Voters* (1911), for the last Reichstag election, says on p.42 concerning the expected world war:

Do our rulers and ruling classes expect the peoples to permit this awful thing? Will not a cry of horror, of scorn, of outrage not seize the peoples and cause them to put an end to this murder? Will they not ask: For whom? What's it all for? Are we mentally disturbed to be treated this way, to allow ourselves to be so treated? He who is calmly convinced of the probability of a great European war can come to no other conclusion than the following: The next European war will be such a desperate gamble as the world has never seen. In all probability it will be the last war.

With speeches and words such as these, our current Reichstag deputies acquired their 110 mandates.

In the summer of 1911, when the *Panther* made its lunge to Agadir and the noisy agitation of the German imperialists put war in the immediate offing, an international meeting in London accepted the following resolution (August 4, 1911):

The delegates of the German, Spanish, English, Dutch, and French workers' organizations declare themselves *to be ready to oppose any declaration of war with all the means at their disposal*. Every represented nation undertakes the obligation, according to the resolutions of national and international congresses, *to act* against all criminal machinations of the ruling classes.

When, in November 1912, the congress of the International met in the minster at Basel and when the long procession of worker representatives entered the cathedral, everyone present felt a presentiment of the greatness of the coming destiny and a heroic resolve.

The cool, skeptical Victor Adler spoke:

Comrades, the most important thing is that we are here at the common source of our strength, that we can draw from this strength so that each can do in his own country what he can, according to the forms and means that we have, to oppose the crime of war with all the power we possess. And if it can be stopped, if it is really stopped, *then we must see to it that it becomes a cornerstone for the end* [of bourgeois society]. This is the moving spirit for the whole International. And if murder and arson and pestilence are unleashed throughout civilized Europe – we can only think of this with horror, outrage and indignation churning in our breasts. *And we ask ourselves: are we men, are the proletarians of today still sheep* that they can be led dumbly to slaughter? ...

And [Jean] Jaurès concluded the reading of the International Bureau's manifesto against the war with these words:

The International represents all the moral force of the world! And if the tragic hour strikes and we must give ourselves up to it, the consciousness of this will support and strengthen us. We do not merely say "no" *but from the depth of our hearts we declare ourselves ready to sacrifice everything.*

It was reminiscent of the Oath of Ruetli. The world directed its gaze to the church at Basel where the bell sounded solemnly for the future great battle between the army of labor and the power of capital ...

Even a week before the outbreak of war, on July 26, 1914, German party newspapers wrote:

We are not marionettes. We combat with all our energy a system that makes men into will-less tools of blind circumstance, this capitalism that seeks to transform a Europe thirsting for peace into a steaming slaughterhouse. If destruction has its way, if the united will to peace of the German, the international proletariat, which will make itself known in powerful demonstrations in the coming days, if the world war cannot be fended off, *then at least this should be the last war, it should become the Götterdämmerung of capitalism.* (*Frankfurter Volksstimme*)

Then on July 30, 1914, the central organ of German Social Democracy stated:

The socialist proletariat rejects any responsibility for the events being brought about by a blinded, a maddened ruling class. Let it be known that *a new life shall bloom from the ruins. All responsibility falls to the wielders of power today!* It is “to be or not to be!” “World-history is the world-court!”

And then came the unheard of, the unprecedented, the 4th of August 1914.

Did it have to come? An event of this scope is certainly no game of chance. It must have deep and wide-reaching objective causes. These causes can, however, also lie in the errors of the leader of the proletariat, the Social Democrats, in the waning of our fighting spirit, our courage, and loyalty to our convictions. Scientific socialism has taught us to comprehend the objective laws of historical development. Men do not make history according to their own free will. But they make history nonetheless. Proletarian action is dependent upon the degree of maturity in social development. However, social development is not independent of the proletariat but is equally its driving force and cause, its effect and consequence. [Proletarian] action participates in history. And while we can as little skip a stage of historical development as escape our shadow, we can certainly accelerate or retard history.

Socialism is the first popular movement in world history that has set itself the goal of bringing human consciousness, and thereby free will, into play in the social actions of mankind. For this reason, Friedrich Engels designated the final victory of the socialist proletariat a leap of humanity from the animal world into the realm of freedom. This “leap” is also an iron law of history bound to the thousands of seeds of a prior torment-filled and all-too-slow development. But this can never be realized until the development of complex material conditions strikes the incendiary spark of conscious will in the great masses. The victory of socialism will not descend from heaven. It can only be won by a long chain of violent tests of strength between the old and the new powers. The international proletariat under the leadership of the Social Democrats will thereby learn to try to take its history into its own hands; instead of remaining a will-less football, it will take the tiller of social life and become the pilot to the goal of its own history.

Friedrich Engels once said: “Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to socialism or regression into barbarism.” What does “regression into barbarism” mean to our lofty European civilization? Until now, we have all probably read and repeated these words thoughtlessly, without suspecting their fearsome seriousness. A look around us at this moment shows what the regression of bourgeois society into barbarism means. This world war is a regression into barbarism. The triumph of imperialism leads to the annihilation of civilization. At first, this happens

sporadically for the duration of a modern war, but then when the period of unlimited wars begins it progresses toward its inevitable consequences. Today, we face the choice exactly as Friedrich Engels foresaw it a generation ago: either the triumph of imperialism and the collapse of all civilization as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration – a great cemetery. Or the victory of socialism, that means the conscious active struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism and its method of war. This is a dilemma of world history, an either/or; the scales are wavering before the decision of the class-conscious proletariat. The future of civilization and humanity depends on whether or not the proletariat resolves manfully to throw its revolutionary broadsword into the scales. In this war imperialism has won. Its bloody sword of genocide has brutally tilted the scale toward the abyss of misery. The only compensation for all the misery and all the shame would be if we learn from the war how the proletariat can seize mastery of its own destiny and escape the role of the lackey to the ruling classes.

Dearly bought is the modern working class's understanding of its historical vocation. Its emancipation as a class is sown with fearful sacrifices, a veritable path to Golgotha. The June days, the sacrifice of the Commune, the martyrs of the Russian Revolution – a dance of bloody shadows without number. All fell on the field of honor. They are, as Marx wrote about the heroes of the Commune, eternally “enshrined in the great heart of the working class.” Now, millions of proletarians of all tongues fall upon the field of dishonor, of fratricide, lacerating themselves while the song of the slave is on their lips. This, too, we are not spared. We are like the Jews that Moses led through the desert. But we are not lost, and we will be victorious if we have not unlearned how to learn. And if the present leaders of the proletariat, the Social Democrats, do not understand how to learn, then they will go under “to make room for people capable of dealing with a new world.”

Chapter 3

Our party should have been prepared to recognise the real aims of this war, to meet it without surprise, to judge it by its deeper relationship according to their wide political experience. The events and forces that led to August 4, 1914, were no secrets. The world had been preparing for decades, in broad daylight, in the widest publicity, step by step, and hour by hour, for the world war. And if today a number of socialists threaten with horrible destruction the “secret diplomacy” that has brewed this devilry behind the scenes, they are ascribing to these poor wretches a magic power that they little deserve, just as the Botokude whips his fetish for the outbreak of a storm. The so-called captains of nations are, in this war, as at all times, merely chessmen, moved by all-powerful historic events and forces, on the surface of capitalist society. If ever there were persons capable of understanding these events and occurrences, it was the members of the German social democracy.

Two lines of development in recent history lead straight to the present war. One has its origin in the period when the so-called national states, i.e., the modern states, were first constituted, from the time of the Bismarckian war against France. The war of 1870, which, by the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, threw the French republic into the arms of Russia, split Europe into two opposing camps and opened up a period of insane competitive armament, first piled up the firebrands for the present world conflagration.

Bismarck's troops were still stationed in France when Marx wrote to the *Braunschweiger Ausschuss*:

He who is not deafened by the momentary clamour, and is not interested in deafening the German people, must see that the war of 1870 carries with it, of necessity, a war

between Germany and Russia, just as the war of 1866 bore the war of 1870. I say of necessity, unless the unlikely should happen, unless a revolution breaks out in Russia before that time. If this does not occur, a war between Germany and Russia may even now be regarded as *un fait accompli*. It depends entirely upon the attitude of the German victor to determine whether this war has been useful or dangerous. If they take Alsace-Lorraine, then France with Russia will arm against Germany. It is superfluous to point out the disastrous consequences.

At that time this prophecy was laughed down. The bonds which united Russia and Prussia seemed so strong that it was considered madness to believe in a union of autocratic Russia with republican France. Those who supported this conception were laughed at as madmen. And yet everything that Marx has prophesied has happened, to the last letter. "For that is," says Auer in his *Sedanfeier*, "social democratic politics, seeing things clearly as they are, and differing therein from the day-by-day politics of the others, bowing blindly down before every momentary success."

This must not be misunderstood to mean that the desire for revenge for the robbery accomplished by Bismarck has driven the French into a war with Germany, that the kernel of the present war is to be found in the much discussed "revenge for Alsace-Lorraine." This is the convenient nationalist legend of the German war agitator, who creates fables of a darkly-brooding France that "cannot forget" its defeat, just as the Bismarckian press-servants ranted of the dethroned Princess Austria who could not forget her erstwhile superiority over the charming Cinderella Prussia. As a matter of fact revenge for Alsace-Lorraine has become the theatrical property of a couple of patriotic clowns, the "Lion de Belfort" nothing more than an ancient survival.

The annexation of Alsace-Lorraine long ago ceased to play a role in French politics, being superseded by new, more pressing cares; and neither the government nor any serious party in France thought of a war with Germany because of these territories. If, nevertheless, the Bismarck heritage has become the firebrand that started this world conflagration, it is rather in the sense of having driven Germany on the one hand, and France, and with it all of Europe, on the other, along the downward path of military competition, of having brought about the Franco-Russian alliance, of having united Austria with Germany as an inevitable consequence. This gave to Russian czarism a tremendous prestige as a factor in European politics. Germany and France have systematically fawned before Russia for her favour. At that time the links were forged that united Germany with Austria-Hungary, whose strength, as the words quoted from the *White Book* show, lie in their "brotherhood in arms," in the present war.

Thus the war of 1870 brought in its wake the outward political grouping of Europe about the axes of the Franco-German antagonism, and established the rule of militarism in the lives of the European peoples. Historical development has given to this ride and to this grouping an entirely new content. The second line that leads to the present world war, and which again brilliantly justifies Marx's prophecy, has its origin in international occurrences that Marx did not live to see, in the imperialist development of the last twenty-five years.

The growth of capitalism, spreading out rapidly over a reconstituted Europe after the war period of the sixties and seventies, particularly after the long period of depression that followed the inflation and the panic of the year 1873, reaching an unnatural zenith in the prosperity of the nineties opened up a new period of storm and danger among the nations of Europe. They were competing in their expansion toward the non-capitalist countries and zones of the world. As early as the eighties a strong tendency toward colonial expansion became apparent. England secured control of Egypt and created for itself, in South Africa, a powerful colonial empire, France took possession of Tunis in North Africa and Tonkin in East Asia; Italy gained a foothold in Abyssinia;

Russia accomplished its conquests in Central Asia and pushed forward into Manchuria; Germany won its first colonies in Africa and in the South Sea, and the United States joined the circle when it procured the Philippines with “interests” in Eastern Asia. This period of feverish conquests has brought on, beginning with the Chinese-Japanese War in 1895, a practically uninterrupted chain of bloody wars, reaching its height in the Great Chinese Invasion, and closing with the Russo-Japanese War of 1904.

All these occurrences, coming blow upon blow, created new, extra-European antagonisms on all sides: between Italy and France in Northern Africa, between France and England in Egypt, between England and Russia in Central Asia, between Russia and Japan in Eastern Asia, between Japan and England in China, between the United States and Japan in the Pacific Ocean – a very restless ocean, full of sharp conflicts and temporary alliances, of tension and relaxation, threatening every few years to break out into a war between European powers. It was clear to everybody, therefore, (1) that the secret underhand war of each capitalist nation against every other, on the backs of Asiatic and African peoples must sooner or later lead to a general reckoning, that the wind that was sown in Africa and Asia would return to Europe as a terrific storm, the more certainly since increased armament of the European states was the constant associate of these Asiatic and African occurrences; (2) that the European world war would have to come to an outbreak as soon as the partial and changing conflicts between the imperialist states found a centralised axis, a conflict of sufficient magnitude to group them, for the time being, into large, opposing factions. This situation was created by the appearance of German imperialism.

In Germany one may study the development of Imperialism, crowded as it was into the shortest possible space of time, in concrete form. The unprecedented rapidity of German industrial and commercial development since the foundation of the empire brought out during the eighties two characteristically peculiar forms of capitalist accumulation: the most pronounced growth of monopoly in Europe and the best developed and most concentrated banking system in the whole world. The monopolies have organised the steel and iron industry, i.e., the branch of capitalist endeavour most interested in government orders, in militaristic equipment and in imperialistic undertakings (railroad building, the exploitation of mines, etc.) into the most influential factor in the nation. The latter has cemented the money interests into a firmly organised whole, with the greatest, most virile energy, creating a power that autocratically rules the industry, commerce and credit of the nation, dominant in private as well as public affairs, boundless in its powers of expansion, ever hungry for profit and activity, impersonal, and therefore, liberal-minded, reckless and unscrupulous, international by its very nature, ordained by its capacities to use the world as its stage.

Germany is under a personal regime, with strong initiative and spasmodic activity, with the weakest kind of parliamentarism, incapable of opposition, uniting all capitalist strata in the sharpest opposition to the working class. It is obvious that this live, unhampered imperialism, coming upon the world stage at a time when the world was practically divided up, with gigantic appetites, soon became an irresponsible factor of general unrest.

This was already foreshadowed by the radical upheaval that took place in the military policies of the empire at the end of the nineties. At that time two naval budgets were introduced which doubled the naval power of Germany and provided for a naval program covering almost two decades. This meant a sweeping change in the financial and trade policy of the nation. In the first place, it involved a striking change in the foreign policy of the empire. The policy of Bismarck was founded upon the principle that the empire is and must remain a land power, that the German fleet, at best, is but a very dispensable requisite for coastal defence. Even the secretary of state, Hollmann, declared in March 1897, in the Budget Commission of the Reichstag: “We need no navy for coastal

defence. Our coasts protect themselves.”

With the two naval bills an entirely new program was promulgated: on land and sea, Germany first. This marks the change from Bismarckian continental policies to *Weltpolitik*, from the defensive to the offensive as the end and aim of Germany’s military program. The language of these facts was so unmistakable that the Reichstag itself furnished the necessary commentary. Lieber, the leader of the Center at that time, spoke on the eleventh of March, 1896, after a famous speech of the emperor on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the German empire, which had developed the new program as a forerunner to the naval bills, in which he mentioned “shoreless naval planer against which Germany must be prepared to enter into active opposition.” Another Center leader, Schadler, cried out in the Reichstag on March 23, 1898, when the first naval bill was under discussion, “The nation believes that we cannot be first on land and first on sea. You answer, gentlemen, that is not what we want! Nevertheless, gentlemen, you are at the beginning of such a conception, at a very strong beginning.”

When the second bill came, the same Schadler declared in the Reichstag on the fifth of February, 1900, referring to previous promises that there would be no further naval bills, “and today comes this bill, which means nothing more and nothing less than the inauguration of a world fleet, as a basis of support for world policies, by doubling our navy and binding the next two decades by our demands.” As a matter of fact the government openly defended the political program of its new course of action. On December 11, 1899, von Bülow, at that time state secretary of the foreign office, in a defence of the second naval bill stated,

When the English speak of “a greater Britain,” when the French talk of “The New France,” when the Russians open up Asia for themselves, we too have a right to aspire to a greater Germany. If we do not create a navy sufficient to protect our trade, our natives in foreign lands, our missions and the safety of our shores, we are threatening the most vital interests of our nation. In the coming century the German people will be either the hammer or the anvil.

Strip this of its coastal defence ornamentation, and there remains the colossal program: greater Germany, as the hammer upon other nations.

It is not difficult to determine the direction toward which these provocations, in the main, were directed. Germany was to become the rival of the world’s great naval force – England. And England did not fail to understand. The naval reform bills, and the speeches that ushered them in, created a lively unrest in England, an unrest that has never again subsided. In March 1910, Lord Robert Cecil said in the House of Commons during a naval debate: “I challenge any man to give me a plausible reason for the tremendous navy that Germany is building up, other than to take up the fight against England.” The fight for supremacy on the ocean that lasted for one and a half decades on both sides and culminated in the feverish building of dreadnoughts and superdreadnoughts, was, in effect, the war between Germany and England. The naval bill of December 11, 1899, was a declaration of war by Germany, which England answered on August 4, 1914.

It should be noted that this fight for naval supremacy had nothing in common with the economic rivalry for the world market. The English “monopoly of the world market” which ostensibly hampered German industrial development, so much discussed at the present time, really belongs to the sphere of those war legends of which the ever green French “revenge” is the most useful. This “monopoly” had become an old time fairy tale, to the lasting regret of the English capitalists. The industrial development of France, Belgium, Italy, Russia, India and Japan, and above all, of Germany and America, had put an end to this monopoly of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Side by side with England, one nation after another stepped into the world market, capitalism developed automatically, and with gigantic strides, into world economy.

English supremacy on the sea, which has robbed so many social democrats of their peaceful sleep, and which, it seems to these gentlemen, must be destroyed to preserve international socialism, had, up to this time, disturbed German capitalism so little that the latter was able to grow up into a lusty youth, with bursting cheeks, under its “yoke.” Yes, England itself, and its colonies, were the cornerstones for German industrial growth. And similarly, Germany became, for the English nation, its most important and most necessary customer. Far from standing in each other’s way, British and German capitalist development were mutually highly interdependent, and united by a far-reaching system of division of labour, strongly augmented by England’s free trade policy. German trade and its interests in the world market, therefore, had nothing whatever to do with a change of front in German politics and with the building of its fleet.

Nor did German colonial possessions at that time come into conflict with the English control of the seas. German colonies were not in need of protection by a first-class sea power. No one, certainly not England, envied Germany her possessions. That they were taken during the war by England and Japan, that the booty had changed owners, is but a generally accepted war measure, just as German imperialist appetites clamour for Belgium, a desire that no man outside of an insane asylum would have dared to express in time of peace. South-East and South-West Africa, Wilhelmsland or Tsingtau would never have caused any war, by land or by sea, between Germany and England. In fact, just before the war broke out, a treaty regulating a peaceable division of the Portuguese colonies in Africa between these two nations had been practically completed.

When Germany unfolded its banner of naval power and world policies it announced the desire for new and far-reaching conquest in the world by German imperialism. By means of a first-class aggressive navy, and by military forces that increased in a parallel ratio, the apparatus for a future policy was established, opening wide the doors for unprecedented possibilities. Naval building and military armaments became the glorious business of German industry, opening up a boundless prospect for further operations by trust and bank capital in the whole wide world. Thus, the acquiescence of all capitalist parties and their rallying under the flag of imperialism was assured. The Center followed the example of the National Liberals, the staunchest defenders of the steel and iron industry, and, by adopting the naval bill it had loudly denounced in 1900, became the party of the government. The Progressives trotted after the Center when the successor to the naval bill – the high-tariff party – came up; while the Junkers, the staunchest opponents of the “horrid navy” and of the canal brought up the rear as the most enthusiastic porkers and parasites of the very policy of sea-militarism and colonial robbery they had so vehemently opposed. The Reichstag election of 1907, the so-called Hottentot Elections, found the whole of Germany in a paroxysm of imperialistic enthusiasm, firmly united under one flag, that of the Germany of von Buelow, the Germany that felt itself ordained to play the role of the hammer in the world. These elections, with their spiritual pogrom atmosphere, were a prelude to the Germany of August 4, a challenge not only to the German working class, but to other capitalist nations as well, a challenge directed to no one in particular, a mailed fist shaken in the face of the entire world ...

Chapter 8

In spite of the military dictatorship and censorship of the press, in spite of the abdication of the Social Democrats, in spite of the fratricidal war, the class struggle rises with elemental force from out of the *Burgfrieden*; and the international solidarity of labor from out of the bloody mists of the

battlefield. Not in the weak and artificial attempts to galvanize the old International, not in pledges renewed here and there to stand together again *after* the war. No! Now in and from the war the fact emerges with a wholly new power and energy that the proletarians of all lands have one and the same interests. The war itself dispels the illusion it has created.

Victory or defeat? Thus sounds the slogan of the ruling militarism in all the warring countries, and, like an echo, the Social Democratic leaders have taken it up. Supposedly, victory or defeat on the battlefield should be for the proletarians of Germany, France, England, or Russia exactly the same as for the ruling classes of these countries. As soon as the cannons thunder, every proletarian should be interested in the victory of his own country and, therefore, in the defeat of the other countries. Let us see what such a victory can bring to the proletariat.

According to official version, adopted uncritically by the Social Democratic leaders, German victory holds the prospect of unlimited economic growth, while defeat means economic ruin. This conception rests upon the pattern of the war of 1870. However, the flourishing capitalism following that war was not the consequence of the war but of the political unification, even though this came in the crippled form of Bismarck's German Empire. Economic growth proceeded out of unification *despite* the war and the many reactionary obstacles that came in its wake. What the victorious war contributed to all this was the entrenchment of the military monarchy in Germany and the rule of the Prussian Junkers; the defeat of France helped liquidate the [Second] Empire and establish the [Third] Republic.

But today matters are quite different in the belligerent states. Today war does not function as a dynamic method of procuring for rising young capitalism the preconditions of its "national" development. War has this character only in the isolated and fragmentary case of Serbia. Reduced to its historically objective essence, today's world war is entirely a competitive struggle amongst fully mature capitalisms for world domination, for the exploitation of the remaining zones of the world not yet capitalistic. That is why this war is totally different in character and effects. The high degree of economic development in the capitalist world is expressed in the extraordinarily advanced technology, that is, in the destructive power of the weaponry which approaches the same level in all the warring nations. The international organization of the murder industry is reflected now in the military balance, the scales of which always right themselves after partial decisions and momentary changes; a general decision is always and again pushed into the future. The indecisiveness of military results leads to ever new reserves from the population masses of warring and hitherto neutral nations being sent into fire. The war finds abundant material to feed imperialist appetites and contradictions, creates its own supplies of these, and spreads like wildfire. But the mightier the masses and the more numerous the nations dragged into the war on all sides, the more drawn out its existence will be.

Considered all together, and before any decision regarding military victory or defeat has been taken, the effect of the war will be unlike any phenomenon of earlier wars in the modern age: the economic ruin of all belligerents and to an increasing degree that of the formally neutral as well. Every additional month of the war affirms and extends this result and postpones the expected fruits of military success for decades. In the last analysis, neither victory nor defeat can change any of this. On the contrary, it makes a purely military decision extremely unlikely and leads one to conclude the greater probability that the war will end finally with the most general and mutual exhaustion.

...

Thus proletarian policy is locked in a dilemma when trying to decide on which side it ought to intervene, which side represents progress and democracy in this war. In these circumstances, and from the perspective of international politics as a whole, victory or defeat, in political as well as

economic terms, comes down to a hopeless choice between two kinds of beatings for the European working classes. Therefore, it is nothing but fatal madness when the French socialists imagine that the military defeat of Germany will strike a blow at the head of militarism and imperialism and thereby pave the way for peaceful democracy in the world. Imperialism and its servant, militarism, will calculate their profits from every victory and every defeat in this war – except in one case: if the international proletariat intervenes in a revolutionary way and puts an end to such calculations.

This war's most important lesson for the policy of the proletariat is the unassailable fact that it cannot parrot the slogan *Victory or Defeat*, not in Germany or in France, not in England or in Russia. Only from the standpoint of imperialism does this slogan have any real content. For every Great Power it is identical to the question of gain or loss of political standing, of annexations, colonies, and military predominance. From the standpoint of class for the European proletariat as a whole the victory and defeat of any of the warring camps is equally disastrous.

It is war as such, no matter how it ends militarily, that signifies the greatest defeat for Europe's proletariat. It is only the overcoming of war and the speediest possible enforcement of peace by the international militancy of the proletariat that can bring victory to the workers' cause. And in reality this victory alone can simultaneously rescue Belgium as well as democracy in Europe.

The class-conscious proletariat cannot identify with any of the military camps in this war. Does it follow that proletarian policy ought to demand maintenance of the status quo, that we have no other action program beyond the wish that everything should be as it was before the war? But existing conditions have never been our ideal; they have never expressed the self-determination of peoples. Furthermore, the earlier conditions are no longer to be saved; they no longer exist, even if historic state borders continue to exist. Even before its results have been formally established, the war has already brought about immense confusion in power relationships, the reciprocal estimate of forces, of alliances, and conflicts. It has sharply revised the relations between states and of classes within society. So many old illusions and potencies have been destroyed, so many new forces and problems have been created that a return to the old Europe as it existed before August 4, 1914 is out of the question. [It is] as out of the question as a return to pre-revolutionary conditions even after a defeated revolution.

Proletarian policy knows no retreat; it can only struggle forward. It must always go beyond the existing and the newly created. In this sense alone, it is legitimate for the proletariat to confront both camps of imperialists in the world war with a policy of its own.

But this policy can not consist of social democratic parties holding international conferences where they individually or collectively compete to discover ingenious recipes with which bourgeois diplomats ought to make the peace and ensure the further peaceful development of democracy. All demands for complete or partial "disarmament," for the dismantling of secret diplomacy, for the partition of all multinational great states into small national one, and so forth are part and parcel utopian as long as capitalist class domination holds the reins. [Capitalism] cannot, under its current imperialist course, dispense with present-day militarism, secret diplomacy, or the centralized multinational state. In fact, it would be more pertinent for the realization of these postulates to make just one simple "demand": abolition of the capitalist class state.

It is not through utopian advice and schemes to tame, ameliorate, or reform imperialism within the framework of the bourgeois state that proletarian policy can reconquer its leading place. The actual problem that the world war has posed to the socialist parties, upon the solution of which the destiny of the workers' movement depends, is this: *the capacity of the proletarian masses for action in the battle against imperialism*. The proletariat does not lack for postulates, prognoses, slogans; it lacks deeds, the capacity for effective resistance to imperialism at the decisive moment, to intervene

against it during [not after] the war and to convert the old slogan “war against war” into practice. Here is the crux of the matter, the Gordian knot of proletarian politics and its long term future.

Imperialism and all its political brutality, the chain of incessant social catastrophes that it has let loose, is undoubtedly an historical necessity for the ruling classes of the contemporary capitalist world. Nothing would be more fatal for the proletariat than to delude itself into believing that it were possible after this war to rescue the idyllic and peaceful continuation of capitalism. However, the conclusion to be drawn by proletarian policy from the historical necessity of imperialism is that surrender to imperialism will mean living forever in its victorious shadow and eating from its leftovers.

The historical dialectic moves forward by contradiction, and establishes in the world the antithesis of every necessity. Bourgeois class domination is undoubtedly an historical necessity, but, so too, the rising of the working class against it. Capital is an historical necessity, but, so too, its grave digger, the socialist proletariat. Imperialist world domination is an historical necessity, but, so too, its destruction by the proletarian international. Step for step there are two historical necessities in conflict with one another. Ours, the necessity of socialism, has the greater stamina. Our necessity enters into its full rights the moment that the other – bourgeois class domination – ceases to be the bearer of historical progress, when it becomes an obstacle, a danger to the further development of society. The capitalist world order, as revealed by the world war, has today reached this point.

The expansionist imperialism of capitalism, the expression of its highest stage of development and its last phase of existence, produces the [following] economic tendencies: it transforms the entire world into the capitalist mode of production; all outmoded, pre-capitalist forms of production and society are swept away; it converts all the world’s riches and means of production into capital, the working masses of all zones into wage slaves. In Africa and Asia, from the northernmost shores to the tip of South America and the South Seas, the remnant of ancient primitive communist associations, feudal systems of domination, patriarchal peasant economies, traditional forms of craftsmanship are annihilated, crushed by capital; whole peoples are destroyed and ancient cultures flattened. All are supplanted by profit mongering in its most modern form.

This brutal victory parade of capital through the world, its way prepared by every means of violence, robbery, and infamy, has its light side. It creates the preconditions for its own final destruction. It put into place the capitalist system of world domination, the indispensable precondition for the socialist world revolution. This alone constitutes the cultural, progressive side of its reputed “great work of civilization” in the primitive lands. For bourgeois-liberal economists and politicians, railroads, Swedish matches, sewer systems, and department stores are “progress” and “civilization.” In themselves these works grafted onto primitive conditions are neither civilization nor progress, for they are bought with the rapid economic and cultural ruin of peoples who must experience simultaneously the full misery and horror of two eras: the traditional natural economic system and the most modern and rapacious capitalist system of exploitation. Thus, the capitalist victory parade and all its works bear the stamp of progress in the historical sense only because they create the material preconditions for the abolition of capitalist domination and class society in general. And in this sense imperialism ultimately works for us.

The world war is a turning point. For the first time, the ravaging beasts set loose upon all quarters of the globe by capitalist Europe have broken into Europe itself. A cry of horror went through the world when Belgium, that precious jewel of European civilization, and when the most august cultural monuments of northern France fell into shards under the impact of the blind forces of destruction. This same “civilized world” looked on passively as the same imperialism ordained the cruel destruction of ten thousand Herero tribesmen and filled the sands of the Kalahari with

the mad shrieks and death rattles of men dying of thirst; [the “civilized world” looked on] as forty thousand men on the Putumayo River [Columbia] were tortured to death within ten years by a band of European captains of industry, while the rest of the people were made into cripples; as in China where an age-old culture was put to the torch by European mercenaries, practiced in all forms of cruelty, annihilation, and anarchy; as Persia was strangled, powerless to resist the tightening noose of foreign domination; as in Tripoli where fire and sword bowed the Arabs beneath the yoke of capitalism, destroyed their culture and habitations. Only today has this “civilized world” become aware that the bite of the imperialist beast brings death, that its very breath is infamy. Only now has [the civilized world] recognized this, after the beast’s ripping talons have clawed its own mother’s lap, the bourgeois civilization of Europe itself. And even this knowledge is grappled with in the distorted form of bourgeois hypocrisy. Every people recognizes the infamy only in the national uniform of the enemy. “German barbarians!” – as though every people that marches out to do organized murder were not transformed instantly into a barbarian horde. “Cossack atrocities!” – as though war itself were not the atrocity of atrocities, as though the praising of human slaughter as heroism in a socialist youth paper were not the purest example of intellectual cossack-dom!

None the less, the imperialist bestiality raging in Europe’s fields has one effect about which the “civilized world” is not horrified and for which it has no breaking heart: that is *the mass destruction of the European proletariat*. Never before on this scale has a war exterminated whole strata of the population; not for a century have all the great and ancient cultural nations of Europe been attacked. Millions of human lives have been destroyed in the Vosges, the Ardennes, in Belgium, Poland, in the Carpathians, on the Save. Millions have been crippled. But of these millions, nine out of ten are working people from the city and the countryside.

It is our strength, our hope, that is mown down day after day like grass under the sickle. The best, most intelligent, most educated forces of international socialism, the bearers of the holiest traditions and the boldest heroes of the modern workers’ movement, the vanguard of the entire world proletariat, the workers of England, France, Belgium, Germany, Russia – these are the ones now being hamstrung and led to the slaughter. These workers of the leading capitalist countries of Europe are exactly the ones who have the historical mission of carrying out the socialist transformation. Only from out of Europe, only from out of the oldest capitalist countries will the signal be given when the hour is ripe for the liberating social revolution. Only the English, French, Belgian, German, Russian, Italian workers together can lead the army of the exploited and enslaved of the five continents. When the time comes, only they can settle accounts with capitalism’s work of global destruction, with its centuries of crime committed against primitive peoples.

But to push ahead to the victory of socialism we need a strong, activist, educated proletariat, and masses whose power lies in intellectual culture as well as numbers. These masses are being decimated by the world war. The flower of our mature and youthful strength, hundreds of thousands of whom were socialistically schooled in England, France, Belgium, Germany, and Russia, the product of decades of educational and agitational training, and other hundreds of thousands who could be won for socialism tomorrow, fall and molder on the miserable battlefields. The fruits of decades of sacrifice and the efforts of generations are destroyed in a few weeks. The key troops of the international proletariat are torn up by the roots.

The blood-letting of the June days [1848] paralyzed the French workers’ movement for a decade and a half. Then the blood-letting of the Commune massacres again retarded it for more than a decade. What is now occurring is an unprecedented mass slaughter that is reducing the adult working population of all the leading civilized countries to women, old people, and cripples. This blood-letting threatens to bleed the European workers’ movement to death. Another such world war

and the outlook for socialism will be buried beneath the rubble heaped up by imperialist barbarism. This is more [significant] than the ruthless destruction of Liege and the Rheims cathedral. This is an assault, not on the bourgeois culture of the past, but on the socialist culture of the future, a lethal blow against that force which carries the future of humanity within itself and which alone can bear the precious treasures of the past into a better society. Here capitalism lays bear its death's head; here it betrays the fact that its historical rationale is used up; its continued domination is no longer reconcilable to the progress of humanity.

The world war today is demonstrably not only murder on a grand scale; it is also suicide of the working classes of Europe. The soldiers of socialism, the proletarians of England, France, Germany, Russia, and Belgium have for months been killing one another at the behest of capital. They are driving the cold steel of murder into each other's hearts. Locked in the embrace of death, they tumble into a common grave.

“Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles! Long live democracy! Long live the Tsar and Slav-dom! Ten thousand tarpaulins guaranteed up to regulations! A hundred thousand kilos of bacon, coffee-substitute for immediate delivery!” ... Dividends are rising, and the proletarians are falling. And with every one there sinks into the grave a fighter of the future, a soldier of the revolution, mankind's savior from the yoke of capitalism.

The madness will cease and the bloody demons of hell will vanish only when workers in Germany and France, England and Russia finally awake from their stupor, extend to each other a brotherly hand, and drown out the bestial chorus of imperialist war-mongers and the shrill cry of capitalist hyenas with labor's old and mighty battle cry:

Proletarians of all lands, unite!

4.2 Zimmerwald Manifesto (1915)

Proletarians of Europe!

The war has lasted more than a year. Millions of corpses cover the battlefields. Millions of human beings have been crippled for the rest of their lives. *Europe is like a gigantic human slaughterhouse.* All civilization, created by the labor of many generations, is doomed to destruction. The most savage barbarism is today celebrating its triumph over all that hitherto constituted the pride of humanity.

Irrespective of the truth as to the direct responsibility for the outbreak of the war, one thing is certain. *The war which has produced this chaos is the outcome of imperialism,* of the attempt on the part of the capitalist classes of each nation, to foster their greed for profit by the exploitation of human labor and of the natural treasures of the entire globe.

Economically backward or politically weak nations are thereby subjugated by the Great Powers who, in this war, are seeking to remake the world map with blood and iron in accord with their exploiting interests. Thus entire nations and countries, like Belgium, Poland, the Balkan states, and Armenia are threatened with the fate of being torn asunder, annexed as a whole or in part as booty in the game of compensations.

In the course of the war, its driving forces are revealed in all their vileness. Shred after shred falls the veil with which the meaning of this world catastrophe was hidden from the consciousness of the peoples. The capitalists of all countries who are coining the red gold of war-profits out of the blood shed by the people, assert that the war is for defense of the fatherland, for democracy, and the liberation of oppressed nations! They lie. *In actual reality, they are burying the freedom of their own people together with the independence of the other nations in the places of devastation.*

New fetters, new chains, new burdens are arising, and it is the proletariat of all countries, of the victorious as well as of the conquered countries, that will have to bear them. Improvement in welfare was proclaimed at the outbreak of the war – want and privation, unemployment and high prices, undernourishment and epidemics are the actual results. *The burdens of war will consume the best energies of the peoples for decades*, endanger the achievements of social reform, and hinder every step forward. Cultural devastation, economic decline, political reaction these are the blessings of this horrible conflict of nations. Thus the war reveals the naked figure of modern capitalism which has become irreconcilable, not only with the interests of the laboring masses, not only with the requirements of historical development, but also with the elementary conditions of human intercourse.

The ruling powers of capitalist society who held the fate of the nations in their hands, the monarchic as well as the republican governments, the secret diplomacy, the mighty business organizations, the bourgeois parties, the capitalist press, the Church – all these bear the full weight of responsibility for this war which arose out of the social order fostering them and protected by them, and which is being waged for their interests.

Workers!

Exploited, disfranchised, scorned, they called you brothers and comrades at the outbreak of the war when you were to be led to the slaughter, to death. And now that militarism has crippled you, mutilated you, degraded and annihilated you, the rulers demand that you surrender your interests, your aims, your ideals – in a word, *servile subordination to civil peace*. They rob you of the possibility of expressing your views, your feelings, your pains; they prohibit you from raising your demands and defending them. The press gagged, political rights and liberties trod upon – this is the way the *military dictatorship* rules today with an iron hand.

This situation which threatens the entire future of Europe and of humanity cannot and must not be confronted by us any longer without action. The Socialist proletariat has waged a struggle against militarism for decades. With growing concern, its representatives at their national and international congresses occupied themselves with the ever more menacing danger of war growing out of imperialism. At *Stuttgart*, at *Copenhagen*, at *Basel*, the international Socialist congresses have indicated the course which the proletariat must follow.

Since the beginning of the war, Socialist parties and labor organizations of various countries that helped to determine this course have disregarded the obligations following from this. Their representatives have called upon the working class *to give up the class struggle*, the only possible and effective method of proletarian emancipation. They have granted credits to the ruling classes for waging the war; they have placed themselves at the disposal of the governments for the most diverse services; through their press and their messengers, they have tried to win the neutrals for the government policies of their countries; they have delivered up to their governments *Socialist Ministers* as hostages for the preservation of civil peace, and *thereby they have assumed the responsibility before the working class, before its present and its future, for this war, for its aims and its methods*. And just as the individual parties, so the highest of the appointed representative bodies of the Socialists of all countries, the *International Socialist Bureau*, has failed them.

These facts are equally responsible for the fact that the international working class which did not succumb to the national panic of the first war period, or which freed itself from it, has still, in the second year of the slaughter of peoples, found no ways and means of taking up an energetic struggle for peace simultaneously in all countries.

In this unbearable situation, we, the representatives of the Socialist parties, trade unions and their minorities, we Germans, French, Italians, Russians, Poles, Letts, Rumanians, Bulgarians,

Swedes, Norwegians, Dutch, and Swiss, we who stand, not on the ground of national solidarity with the exploiting class, but on the ground of the international solidarity of the proletariat and of the class struggle, have assembled to retie the torn threads of international relations and to call upon the working class to recover itself and to fight for peace.

This struggle is the struggle for freedom, for the *reconciliation* of peoples, for Socialism. It is necessary to take up this struggle for peace, for a peace without annexations or war indemnities. *Such a peace, however, is only possible if every thought of violating the rights and liberties of nations is condemned.* Neither the occupation of entire countries nor of separate parts of countries must lead to their violent annexation. No annexation, whether open or concealed, and no forcible economic attachment made still more unbearable by political disfranchisement. *The right of self-determination of nations must be the indestructible principle in the system of national relationships of peoples.*

Proletarians!

Since the outbreak of the war, you have placed your energy, your courage, your endurance at the service of the ruling classes. Now you must stand up for your own cause, for the sacred aims of Socialism, for the emancipation of the oppressed nations as well as of the enslaved classes, by means of the irreconcilable proletarian class struggle.

It is the task and the duty of the Socialists of the belligerent countries to take up this struggle with full force; it is the task and the duty of the Socialists of the neutral states to support their brothers in this struggle against bloody barbarism with every effective means. Never in world history was there a more urgent, a more sublime task, the fulfillment of which should be our common labor. No sacrifice is too great, no burden too heavy in order to achieve this goal: peace among the peoples.

Working men and working women! Mothers and fathers! Widows and orphans! Wounded and crippled! We call to all of you who are suffering from the war and because of the war: Beyond all borders, beyond the reeking battlefields, beyond the devastated cities and villages –

Proletarians of all countries, unite!

Zimmerwald, September 1915.

In the name of the International Socialist Conference:

For the German delegation: Georg Ledebour, Adolf Hoffmann.

For the French delegation: A. Bourderon, A. Merrheim.

For the Italian delegation: G.E. Modigliani, Constantino Lazzari.

For the Russian delegation: N. Lenin, Paul Axelrod, M. Bobrov.

For the Polish delegation: St. Lapinski, A. Warski, Cz. Hanecki.

For the Inter-Balkan Socialist Federation: In the name of the Rumanian delegation: C. Rakovsky;

In the name of the Bulgarian delegation: Wassil Kolarov.

For the Swedish and Norwegian delegation: Z. Høglund, Ture Nerman.

For the Dutch delegation: H. Roland-Holst.

For the Swiss delegation: Robert Grimm, Charles Naine.

4.3 Draft Resolution of the Leftwing Delegates (1915)

The World War, which has been devastating Europe for the last year, is an *imperialist war* waged for the political and economic exploitation of the world, export markets, sources of raw material,

spheres of capital investment, etc. It is a product of capitalist development which connects the entire world in a world economy, but at the same time permits the existence of national state capitalist groups with opposing interests.

If the bourgeoisie and the governments seek to conceal this character of the World War by asserting that it is a question of a forced struggle for *national independence*, it is only to mislead the proletariat, since the war is being waged for the oppression of foreign peoples and countries. Equally untruthful are the legends concerning the defense of democracy in this war, since imperialism signifies the most unscrupulous domination of big capital and political reaction.

Imperialism can only be overcome by overcoming the contradictions which produce it, that is, by the *Socialist organization* of the advanced capitalist countries for which the objective conditions are already ripe.

At the outbreak of the war, the majority of the labor leaders had not raised this only possible slogan in opposition to imperialism. Prejudiced by nationalism, rotten with opportunism, at the *beginning of the World War they betrayed the proletariat to imperialism and gave up the principles of Socialism and thereby the real struggle for the everyday interests of the proletariat.*

Social-patriotism and social-imperialism, the standpoint of the openly patriotic majority of the formerly Social-Democratic leaders in Germany, as well as the opposition-mannered center of the party around Kautsky, and to which *in France and Austria* the majority, *in England and Russia* a part of the leaders (Hyndman, the Fabians, the Trade-Unionists, Plekhanov, Rubanovich, the *Nasha Zarya* group) confess, is a more dangerous enemy to the proletariat than the bourgeois apostles of imperialism, since, misusing the banner of Socialism, it can mislead the unenlightened workers. *The ruthless struggle against social-imperialism constitutes the first condition for the revolutionary mobilization of the proletariat and the reconstruction of the International.*

It is the task of the Socialist parties, as well as of the Socialist opposition in the now social-imperialist parties, to call and lead the laboring masses to the *revolutionary struggle* against the capitalist governments for the conquest of political power for the Socialist organization of society.

Without giving up the struggle for every foot of ground within the framework of capitalism, for every reform strengthening the proletariat, without renouncing any means of organization and agitation, the revolutionary Social-Democrats, on the contrary, must utilize all the struggles, all the reforms demanded by our minimum program for the purpose of sharpening this war crisis as well as every social and political crisis of capitalism of extending them to an attack upon its very foundations. By waging this struggle *under the slogan of Socialism* it will render the laboring masses immune to the slogans of the oppression of one people by another as expressed in the maintenance of the domination of one nation over another, in the cry for new annexations; it will render them deaf to the temptations of national solidarity which has led the proletarians to the battlefields.

The signal for this struggle is the struggle against the World War, for the speedy termination of the slaughter of nations. This struggle demands the refusal of war credits, quitting the cabinets, the denunciation of the capitalist, anti-Socialist character of the war from the tribunes of the parliaments, in the columns of the legal, and where necessary illegal, press, the sharpest struggle against social-patriotism, and the utilization of every movement of the people caused by the results of the war (misery, great losses etc.) for the organization of street demonstrations against the governments, propaganda of international solidarity in the trenches, the encouragement of economic strikes, the effort to transform them into political strikes under favorable conditions. Civil war, not civil peace – that is the slogan!

As against all illusions that it is possible to bring about the basis of a lasting peace, the beginning of disarmament, by any decisions of diplomats and the governments, the revolutionary Social-

Democrats must repeatedly tell the masses of the people that only the social revolution can bring about a lasting peace and the emancipation of humanity.

Note: This draft resolution was signed by two representatives of the Central Committee of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (Zinoviev and Lenin), a representative of the Opposition of the Polish Social-Democracy (Radek), a representative of the Latvian province (Winter), a representative each of the Left Social-Democrats of Sweden (Hoglund) and Norway (Nerman), a Swiss delegate (Platten), and a German delegate. On the question of submitting the draft to the commission, 12 delegates voted for (the eight mentioned above, two Socialist-Revolutionaries, Trotsky, and Roland-Holst) and 19 against.

4.4 Declaration of the Left Wing (1915)

The undersigned declare as follows:

The manifesto adopted by the Conference does not give us complete satisfaction. It contains no pronouncement on either open opportunism, or opportunism that is hiding under radical phraseology, the opportunism which is not only the chief cause of the collapse of the International, but which strives to perpetuate that collapse. The manifesto contains no clear pronouncement as to the methods of fighting against the war.

We shall continue, as we have done heretofore, to advocate in the Socialist press and at the meetings of the International, a clear-cut Marxian position in regard to the tasks with which the epoch of imperialism has confronted the proletariat.

We vote for the manifesto because we regard it as a call to struggle and in this struggle we are anxious to march side by side with the other sections of the International.

We request that our present declaration be included in the official proceedings.

Signed: N. Lenin, G. Zinoviev, Radek, Nerman, Hoglund, Winter.

Week 5

The Russian Revolution

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was a determinative event both for the Left and for world history. The events which brought Lenin and the Bolshevik party to power came in two phases: the February Revolution, in which the Tsar was overthrown and a Provisional Government established, and the October Revolution, in which the Bolsheviks seized power from the young republic.

(*Note:* The Julian calendar was in use in 1917 Russia, and dates of the Revolution are usually given in Julian terms rather than in modern Gregorian calendar terms; the Julian calendar was several days behind the Gregorian calendar at the time. For instance, the “October” insurrection actually commenced on November 7th on the Gregorian calendar.)

Lenin released his *April Theses* upon his arrival in Russia from Switzerland, which would define the future course of the Revolution. *State and Revolution*, which Lenin wrote after having fled Russia in July and before his ultimate return in October, lays out his political philosophy in the most polished form he would ever produce.

Contemporary reactions to the Revolution varied. Rosa Luxemburg, in *The Russian Revolution*, offers a defense of the Russian Revolution, with reservations.

The Eley chapter for this week is 8.

5.1 Vladimir Lenin, April Theses (1917)

Introduction

I did not arrive in Petrograd until the night of April 3, and therefore at the meeting on April 4, I could, of course, deliver the report on the tasks of the revolutionary proletariat only on my own behalf, and with reservations as to insufficient preparation.

The only thing I could do to make things easier for myself – and for *honest* opponents – was to prepare the theses *in writing*. I read them out, and gave the text to Comrade Tsereteli. I read them *twice* very slowly: first at a meeting of Bolsheviks and then at a meeting of both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks.

I publish these personal theses of mine with only the briefest explanatory notes, which were developed in far greater detail in the report.

Theses

1) In our attitude towards the war, which under the new [provisional] government of Lvov and Co. unquestionably remains on Russia's part a predatory imperialist war owing to the capitalist nature of that government, not the slightest concession to "revolutionary defencism" is permissible.

The class-conscious proletariat can give its consent to a revolutionary war, which would really justify revolutionary defencism, only on condition: (a) that the power pass to the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants aligned with the proletariat; (b) that all annexations be renounced in deed and not in word; (c) that a complete break be effected in actual fact with all capitalist interests.

In view of the undoubted honesty of those broad sections of the mass believers in revolutionary defencism who accept the war only as a necessity, and not as a means of conquest, in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary with particular thoroughness, persistence and patience to explain their error to them, to explain the inseparable connection existing between capital and the imperialist war, and to prove that without overthrowing capital *it is impossible* to end the war by a truly democratic peace, a peace not imposed by violence.

The most widespread campaign for this view must be organised in the army at the front. Fraternisation.

2) The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is *passing* from the first stage of the revolution – which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organisation of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie – to its *second stage*, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants.

This transition is characterised, on the one hand, by a maximum of legally recognised rights (Russia is *now* the freest of all the belligerent countries in the world); on the other, by the absence of violence towards the masses, and, finally, by their unreasoning trust in the government of capitalists, those worst enemies of peace and socialism.

This peculiar situation demands of us an ability to adapt ourselves to the *special* conditions of Party work among unprecedentedly large masses of proletarians who have just awakened to political life.

3) No support for the Provisional Government; the utter falsity of all its promises should be made clear, particularly of those relating to the renunciation of annexations. Exposure in place of the impermissible, illusion-breeding "demand" that *this* government, a government of capitalists, should *cease* to be an imperialist government.

4) Recognition of the fact that in most of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies our Party is in a minority, so far a small minority, as against a *bloc of all* the petty-bourgeois opportunist elements, from the Popular Socialists and the Socialist-Revolutionaries down to the Organising Committee (Chkheidze, Tsereteli, etc.), Steklov, etc., etc., who have yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie and spread that influence among the proletariat.

The masses must be made to see that the Soviets of Workers' Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government, and that therefore our task is, as long as *this* government yields to the influence of the bourgeoisie, to present a patient, systematic, and persistent explanation of the errors of their tactics, an *explanation* especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.

As long as we are in the minority we carry on the work of criticising and exposing errors and at the same time we preach the necessity of transferring the entire state power to the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, so that the people may overcome their mistakes by experience.

5) Not a parliamentary republic – to return to a parliamentary republic from the Soviets of Workers' Deputies would be a retrograde step – but a republic of Soviets of Workers', Agricultural

Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies throughout the country, from top to bottom.

Abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy.¹

The salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, not to exceed the average wage of a competent worker.

6) The weight of emphasis in the agrarian programme to be shifted to the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies.

Confiscation of all landed estates.

Nationalisation of *all* lands in the country, the land to be disposed of by the local Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' and Peasants' Deputies. The organisation of separate Soviets of Deputies of Poor Peasants. The setting up of a model farm on each of the large estates (ranging in size from 100 to 300 dessiatines, according to local and other conditions, and to the decisions of the local bodies) under the control of the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers' Deputies and for the public account.

7) The immediate union of all banks in the country into a single national bank, and the institution of control over it by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.

8) It is not our *immediate* task to "introduce" socialism, but only to bring social production and the distribution of products at once under the *control* of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies.

9) Party tasks:

(a) Immediate convocation of a Party congress;

(b) Alteration of the Party Programme, mainly:

(1) On the question of imperialism and the imperialist war,

(2) On our attitude towards the state and *our* demand for a "commune state"²;

(3) Amendment of our out-of-date minimum programme;

(c) Change of the Party's name.³

10) A new International.

We must take the initiative in creating a revolutionary International, an International against the *social-chauvinists* and against the "Centre".⁴

In order that the reader may understand why I had especially to emphasise as a rare exception the "case" of honest opponents, I invite him to compare the above theses with the following objection by Mr. Goldenberg: Lenin, he said, "has planted the banner of civil war in the midst of revolutionary democracy" (quoted in No. 5 of Mr. Plekhanov's *Yedinstvo*).

Isn't it a gem?

I write, announce and elaborately explain: "In view of the undoubted honesty of those *broad* sections of the *mass* believers in revolutionary defencism ... in view of the fact that they are being deceived by the bourgeoisie, it is necessary with *particular* thoroughness, persistence and *patience* to explain their error to them..."

Yet the bourgeois gentlemen who call themselves Social-Democrats, who *do not* belong either to the *broad* sections or to the *mass* believers in defencism, with serene brow present my views thus: "The banner[!] of civil war" (of which there is not a word in the theses and not a word in my speech!) has been planted(!) "in the midst [!!] of revolutionary democracy..."

¹i.e. the standing army to be replaced by the arming of the whole people.

²i.e., a state of which the Paris Commune was the prototype.

³Instead of "Social-Democracy", whose official leaders *throughout* the world have betrayed socialism and deserted to the bourgeoisie (the "defencists" and the vacillating "Kautskyites"), we must call ourselves the *Communist Party*.

⁴The "Centre" in the international Social-Democratic movement is the trend which vacillates between the chauvinists (= "defencists") and internationalists, i.e., Kautsky and Co. in Germany, Longuet and Co. in France, Chkheidze and Co. in Russia, Turati and Co. in Italy, MacDonald and Co. in Britain, etc.

What does this mean? In what way does this differ from riot-inciting agitation, from *Russkaya Volya*?

I write, announce and elaborately explain: “The Soviets of Workers’ Deputies are the *only possible* form of revolutionary government, and therefore our task is to present a patient, systematic, and persistent *explanation* of the errors of their tactics, an explanation especially adapted to the practical needs of the masses.”

Yet opponents of a certain brand present my views as a call to “civil war in the midst of revolutionary democracy”!

I attacked the Provisional Government for *not* having appointed an early date or any date at all, for the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, and for confining itself to promises. I argued that *without* the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies the convocation of the Constituent Assembly is not guaranteed and its success is impossible.

And the view is attributed to me that I am opposed to the speedy convocation of the Constituent Assembly!

I would call this “raving”, had not decades of political struggle taught me to regard honesty in opponents as a rare exception.

Mr. Plekhanov in his paper called my speech “raving”. Very good, Mr. Plekhanov! But look how awkward, uncouth and slow-witted you are in your polemics. If I delivered a raving speech for two hours, how is it that an audience of hundreds tolerated this “raving”? Further, why does your paper devote a whole column to an account of the “raving”? Inconsistent, highly inconsistent!

It is, of course, much easier to shout, abuse, and howl than to attempt to relate, to explain, to recall *what* Marx and Engels said in 1871, 1872 and 1875 about the experience of the Paris Commune and about the *kind* of state the proletariat needs. [See: *The Civil War in France* and *Critique of the Gotha Programme*]

Ex-Marxist Mr. Plekhanov evidently does not care to recall Marxism.

I quoted the words of Rosa Luxemburg, who on August 4, 1914, called *German Social-Democracy* a “stinking corpse”. And the Plekhanovs, Goldenbergs and Co. feel “offended”. On whose behalf? On behalf of the *German* chauvinists, because they were called chauvinists!

They have got themselves in a mess, these poor Russian social-chauvinists – socialists in word and chauvinists in deed.

5.2 Vladimir Lenin, State and Revolution (1917)

Preface to the First Edition

The question of the state is now acquiring particular importance both in theory and in practical politics. The imperialist war has immensely accelerated and intensified the process of transformation of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism. The monstrous oppression of the working people by the state, which is merging more and more with the all-powerful capitalist associations, is becoming increasingly monstrous. The advanced countries – we mean their hinterland – are becoming military convict prisons for the workers.

The unprecedented horrors and miseries of the protracted war are making the people’s position unbearable and increasing their anger. The world proletarian revolution is clearly maturing. The question of its relation to the state is acquiring practical importance.

The elements of opportunism that accumulated over the decades of comparatively peaceful development have given rise to the trend of social-chauvinism which dominated the official socialist

parties throughout the world. This trend – socialism in words and chauvinism in deeds (Plekhanov, Potresov, Breshkovskaya, Rubanovich, and, in a slightly veiled form, Tsereteli, Chernov and Co. in Russia; Scheidemann, Legien, David and others in Germany; Renaudel, Guesde and Vandervelde in France and Belgium; Hyndman and the Fabians in England, etc., etc.) – is conspicuous for the base, servile adaptation of the “leaders of socialism” to the interests not only of “their” national bourgeoisie, but of “their” state, for the majority of the so-called Great Powers have long been exploiting and enslaving a whole number of small and weak nations. And the imperialist war is a war for the division and redivision of this kind of booty. The struggle to free the working people from the influence of the bourgeoisie in general, and of the imperialist bourgeoisie in particular, is impossible without a struggle against opportunist prejudices concerning the “state”.

First of all we examine the theory of Marx and Engels of the state, and dwell in particular detail on those aspects of this theory which are ignored or have been distorted by the opportunists. Then we deal specially with the one who is chiefly responsible for these distortions, Karl Kautsky, the best-known leader of the Second International (1889-1914), which has met with such miserable bankruptcy in the present war. Lastly, we sum up the main results of the experience of the Russian revolutions of 1905 and particularly of 1917. Apparently, the latter is now (early August 1917) completing the first stage of its development; but this revolution as a whole can only be understood as a link in a chain of socialist proletarian revolutions being caused by the imperialist war. The question of the relation of the socialist proletarian revolution to the state, therefore, is acquiring not only practical political importance, but also the significance of a most urgent problem of the day, the problem of explaining to the masses what they will have to do before long to free themselves from capitalist tyranny.

...

Chapter I: Class Society and the State

1. The State: A Product of the Irreconcilability of Class Antagonisms

What is now happening to Marx’s theory has, in the course of history, happened repeatedly to the theories of revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes fighting for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their *names* to a certain extent for the “consolation” of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its *substance*, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it. Today, the bourgeoisie and the opportunists within the labor movement concur in this doctoring of Marxism. They omit, obscure, or distort the revolutionary side of this theory, its revolutionary soul. They push to the foreground and extol what is or seems acceptable to the bourgeoisie. All the social-chauvinists are now “Marxists” (don’t laugh!). And more and more frequently German bourgeois scholars, only yesterday specialists in the annihilation of Marxism, are speaking of the “national-German” Marx, who, they claim, educated the labor unions which are so splendidly organized for the purpose of waging a predatory war!

In these circumstances, in view of the unprecedentedly wide-spread distortion of Marxism, our prime task is to re-establish what Marx really taught on the subject of the state. This will necessitate a number of long quotations from the works of Marx and Engels themselves. Of course, long quotations will render the text cumbersome and not help at all to make it popular reading,

but we cannot possibly dispense with them. All, or at any rate all the most essential passages in the works of Marx and Engels on the subject of the state must by all means be quoted as fully as possible so that the reader may form an independent opinion of the totality of the views of the founders of scientific socialism, and of the evolution of those views, and so that their distortion by the “Kautskyism” now prevailing may be documentarily proved and clearly demonstrated.

Let us begin with the most popular of Engels’ works, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the sixth edition of which was published in Stuttgart as far back as 1894. We have to translate the quotations from the German originals, as the Russian translations, while very numerous, are for the most part either incomplete or very unsatisfactory.

Summing up his historical analysis, Engels says:

The state is, therefore, by no means a power forced on society from without; just as little is it ‘the reality of the ethical idea’, ‘the image and reality of reason’, as Hegel maintains. Rather, it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state. (Pp.177-78, sixth edition)

This expresses with perfect clarity the basic idea of Marxism with regard to the historical role and the meaning of the state. The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable.

It is on this most important and fundamental point that the distortion of Marxism, proceeding along two main lines, begins.

On the one hand, the bourgeois, and particularly the petty-bourgeois, ideologists, compelled under the weight of indisputable historical facts to admit that the state only exists where there are class antagonisms and a class struggle, “correct” Marx in such a way as to make it appear that the state is an organ for the reconciliation of classes. According to Marx, the state could neither have arisen nor maintained itself had it been possible to reconcile classes. From what the petty-bourgeois and philistine professors and publicists say, with quite frequent and benevolent references to Marx, it appears that the state does reconcile classes. According to Marx, the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another; it is the creation of “order”, which legalizes and perpetuates this oppression by moderating the conflict between classes. In the opinion of the petty-bourgeois politicians, however, order means the reconciliation of classes, and not the oppression of one class by another; to alleviate the conflict means reconciling classes and not depriving the oppressed classes of definite means and methods of struggle to overthrow the oppressors.

For instance, when, in the revolution of 1917, the question of the significance and role of the state arose in all its magnitude as a practical question demanding immediate action, and, moreover, action on a mass scale, all the Social-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks descended at once to the petty-bourgeois theory that the “state” “reconciles” classes. Innumerable resolutions and articles

by politicians of both these parties are thoroughly saturated with this petty-bourgeois and philistine “reconciliation” theory. That the state is an organ of the rule of a definite class which cannot be reconciled with its antipode (the class opposite to it) is something the petty-bourgeois democrats will never be able to understand. Their attitude to the state is one of the most striking manifestations of the fact that our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks are not socialists at all (a point that we Bolsheviks have always maintained), but petty-bourgeois democrats using near-socialist phraseology.

On the other hand, the “Kautskyite” distortion of Marxism is far more subtle. “Theoretically”, it is not denied that the state is an organ of class rule, or that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. But what is overlooked or glossed over is this: if the state is the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms, if it is a power standing above society and “alienating itself more and more from it”, it is clear that the liberation of the oppressed class is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class and which is the embodiment of this “alienation”. As we shall see later, Marx very explicitly drew this theoretically self-evident conclusion on the strength of a concrete historical analysis of the tasks of the revolution. And – as we shall show in detail further on – it is this conclusion which Kautsky has “forgotten” and distorted.

2. Special Bodies of Armed Men, Prisons, etc.

Engels continues:

As distinct from the old gentile [tribal or clan] order, the state, first, divides its subjects according to territory...

This division seems “natural” to us, but it costs a prolonged struggle against the old organization according to generations or tribes.

The second distinguishing feature is the establishment of a public power which no longer directly coincides with the population organizing itself as an armed force. This special, public power is necessary because a self-acting armed organization of the population has become impossible since the split into classes... This public power exists in every state; it consists not merely of armed men but also of material adjuncts, prisons, and institutions of coercion of all kinds, of which gentile [clan] society knew nothing...

Engels elucidates the concept of the “power” which is called the state, a power which arose from society but places itself above it and alienates itself more and more from it. What does this power mainly consist of? It consists of special bodies of armed men having prisons, etc., at their command.

We are justified in speaking of special bodies of armed men, because the public power which is an attribute of every state “does not directly coincide” with the armed population, with its “self-acting armed organization”.

Like all great revolutionary thinkers, Engels tries to draw the attention of the class-conscious workers to what prevailing philistinism regards as least worthy of attention, as the most habitual thing, hallowed by prejudices that are not only deep-rooted but, one might say, petrified. A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But how can it be otherwise?

From the viewpoint of the vast majority of Europeans of the end of the 19th century, whom Engels was addressing, and who had not gone through or closely observed a single great revolution,

it could not have been otherwise. They could not understand at all what a “self-acting armed organization of the population” was. When asked why it became necessary to have special bodies of armed men placed above society and alienating themselves from it (police and a standing army), the West-European and Russian philistines are inclined to utter a few phrases borrowed from Spencer or Mikhailovsky, to refer to the growing complexity of social life, the differentiation of functions, and so on.

Such a reference seems “scientific”, and effectively lulls the ordinary person to sleep by obscuring the important and basic fact, namely, the split of society into irreconcilable antagonistic classes.

Were it not for this split, the “self-acting armed organization of the population” would differ from the primitive organization of a stick-wielding herd of monkeys, or of primitive men, or of men united in clans, by its complexity, its high technical level, and so on. But such an organization would still be possible.

It is impossible because civilized society is split into antagonistic, and, moreover, irreconcilably antagonistic classes, whose “self-acting” arming would lead to an armed struggle between them. A state arises, a special power is created, special bodies of armed men, and every revolution, by destroying the state apparatus, shows us the naked class struggle, clearly shows us how the ruling class strives to restore the special bodies of armed men which serve it, and how the oppressed class strives to create a new organization of this kind, capable of serving the exploited instead of the exploiters.

In the above argument, Engels raises theoretically the very same question which every great revolution raises before us in practice, palpably and, what is more, on a scale of mass action, namely, the question of the relationship between “special” bodies of armed men and the “self-acting armed organization of the population”. We shall see how this question is specifically illustrated by the experience of the European and Russian revolutions.

But to return to Engels’ exposition.

He points out that sometimes – in certain parts of North America, for example – this public power is weak (he has in mind a rare exception in capitalist society, and those parts of North America in its pre-imperialist days where the free colonists predominated), but that, generally speaking, it grows stronger:

It [the public power] grows stronger, however, in proportion as class antagonisms within the state become more acute, and as adjacent states become larger and more populous. We have only to look at our present-day Europe, where class struggle and rivalry in conquest have tuned up the public power to such a pitch that it threatens to swallow the whole of society and even the state.

This was written not later than the early nineties of the last century, Engels’ last preface being dated June 16, 1891. The turn towards imperialism – meaning the complete domination of the trusts, the omnipotence of the big banks, a grand-scale colonial policy, and so forth – was only just beginning in France, and was even weaker in North America and in Germany. Since then “rivalry in conquest” has taken a gigantic stride, all the more because by the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century the world had been completely divided up among these “rivals in conquest”, i.e., among the predatory Great Powers. Since then, military and naval armaments have grown fantastically and the predatory war of 1914-17 for the domination of the world by Britain or Germany, for the division of the spoils, has brought the “swallowing” of all the forces of society by the rapacious state power close to complete catastrophe.

Engels could, as early as 1891, point to “rivalry in conquest” as one of the most important distinguishing features of the foreign policy of the Great Powers, while the social-chauvinist scoundrels have ever since 1914, when this rivalry, many time intensified, gave rise to an imperialist war, been covering up the defence of the predatory interests of “their own” bourgeoisie with phrases about “defence of the fatherland”, “defence of the republic and the revolution”, etc.!

3. The State: an Instrument for the Exploitation of the Oppressed Class

The maintenance of the special public power standing above society requires taxes and state loans.

“Having public power and the right to levy taxes,” Engels writes, “the officials now stand, as organs of society, above society. The free, voluntary respect that was accorded to the organs of the gentile [clan] constitution does not satisfy them, even if they could gain it....” Special laws are enacted proclaiming the sanctity and immunity of the officials. “The shabbiest police servant” has more “authority” than the representative of the clan, but even the head of the military power of a civilized state may well envy the elder of a clan the “unrestrained respect” of society.

The question of the privileged position of the officials as organs of state power is raised here. The main point indicated is: what is it that places them above society? We shall see how this theoretical question was answered in practice by the Paris Commune in 1871 and how it was obscured from a reactionary standpoint by Kautsky in 1912.

“Because the state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but because it arose, at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class....” The ancient and feudal states were organs for the exploitation of the slaves and serfs; likewise, “the modern representative state is an instrument of exploitation of wage-labor by capital. By way of exception, however, periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state power as ostensible mediator acquires, for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both....” Such were the absolute monarchies of the 17th and 18th centuries, the Bonapartism of the First and Second Empires in France, and the Bismarck regime in Germany.

Such, we may add, is the Kerensky government in republican Russia since it began to persecute the revolutionary proletariat, at a moment when, owing to the leadership of the petty-bourgeois democrats, the Soviets have already become impotent, while the bourgeoisie are not yet strong enough simply to disperse them.

In a democratic republic, Engels continues, “wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely”, first, by means of the “direct corruption of officials” (America); secondly, by means of an “alliance of the government and the Stock Exchange” (France and America).

At present, imperialism and the domination of the banks have “developed” into an exceptional art both these methods of upholding and giving effect to the omnipotence of wealth in democratic republics of all descriptions. Since, for instance, in the very first months of the Russian democratic republic, one might say during the honeymoon of the “socialist” S.R.s and Mensheviks joined in

wedlock to the bourgeoisie, in the coalition government. Mr. Palchinsky obstructed every measure intended for curbing the capitalists and their marauding practices, their plundering of the state by means of war contracts; and since later on Mr. Palchinsky, upon resigning from the Cabinet (and being, of course, replaced by another quite similar Palchinsky), was “rewarded” by the capitalists with a lucrative job with a salary of 120,000 rubles per annum – what would you call that? Direct or indirect bribery? An alliance of the government and the syndicates, or “merely” friendly relations? What role do the Chernovs, Tseretelis, Avksentyevs and Skobelevs play? Are they the “direct” or only the indirect allies of the millionaire treasury-looters?

Another reason why the omnipotence of “wealth” is more certain in a democratic republic is that it does not depend on defects in the political machinery or on the faulty political shell of capitalism. A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and, therefore, once capital has gained possession of this very best shell (through the Palchinskys, Chernovs, Tseretelis and Co.), it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it.

We must also note that Engels is most explicit in calling universal suffrage as well an instrument of bourgeois rule. Universal suffrage, he says, obviously taking account of the long experience of German Social-Democracy, is

the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state.

The petty-bourgeois democrats, such as our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and also their twin brothers, all the social-chauvinists and opportunists of Western Europe, expect just this “more” from universal suffrage. They themselves share, and instill into the minds of the people, the false notion that universal suffrage “in the present-day state” is really capable of revealing the will of the majority of the working people and of securing its realization.

Here, we can only indicate this false notion, only point out that Engels’ perfectly clear statement is distorted at every step in the propaganda and agitation of the “official” (i.e., opportunist) socialist parties. A detailed exposure of the utter falsity of this notion which Engels brushes aside here is given in our further account of the views of Marx and Engels on the “present-day” state.

Engels gives a general summary of his views in the most popular of his works in the following words:

The state, then, has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies that did without it, that had no idea of the state and state power. At a certain stage of economic development, which was necessarily bound up with the split of society into classes, the state became a necessity owing to this split. We are now rapidly approaching a stage in the development of production at which the existence of these classes not only will have ceased to be a necessity, but will become a positive hindrance to production. They will fall as they arose at an earlier stage. Along with them the state will inevitably fall. Society, which will reorganize production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of state where it will then belong: into a museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning-wheel and the bronze axe.

We do not often come across this passage in the propaganda and agitation literature of the present-day Social-Democrats. Even when we do come across it, it is mostly quoted in the same manner as one bows before an icon, i.e., it is done to show official respect for Engels, and no

attempt is made to gauge the breadth and depth of the revolution that this relegating of “the whole machinery of state to a museum of antiquities” implies. In most cases we do not even find an understanding of what Engels calls the state machine.

4. The “Withering Away” of the State, and Violent Revolution

Engels’ words regarding the “withering away” of the state are so widely known, they are often quoted, and so clearly reveal the essence of the customary adaptation of Marxism to opportunism that we must deal with them in detail. We shall quote the whole argument from which they are taken.

The proletariat seizes from state power and turns the means of production into state property to begin with. But thereby it abolishes itself as the proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, and abolishes also the state as state. Society thus far, operating amid class antagonisms, needed the state, that is, an organization of the particular exploiting class, for the maintenance of its external conditions of production, and, therefore, especially, for the purpose of forcibly keeping the exploited class in the conditions of oppression determined by the given mode of production (slavery, serfdom or bondage, wage-labor). The state was the official representative of society as a whole, its concentration in a visible corporation. But it was this only insofar as it was the state of that class which itself represented, for its own time, society as a whole: in ancient times, the state of slave-owning citizens; in the Middle Ages, of the feudal nobility; in our own time, of the bourgeoisie. When at last it becomes the real representative of the whole of society, it renders itself unnecessary. As soon as there is no longer any social class to be held in subjection, as soon as class rule, and the individual struggle for existence based upon the present anarchy in production, with the collisions and excesses arising from this struggle, are removed, nothing more remains to be held in subjection – nothing necessitating a special coercive force, a state. The first act by which the state really comes forward as the representative of the whole of society – the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society – is also its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies down of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished’. It withers away. This gives the measure of the value of the phrase ‘a free people’s state’, both as to its justifiable use for a long time from an agitational point of view, and as to its ultimate scientific insufficiency; and also of the so-called anarchists’ demand that the state be abolished overnight. (*Herr Eugen Dühring’s Revolution in Science [Anti-Dühring]*, pp.301-03, third German edition.)

It is safe to say that of this argument of Engels’, which is so remarkably rich in ideas, only one point has become an integral part of socialist thought among modern socialist parties, namely, that according to Marx that state “wither away” – as distinct from the anarchist doctrine of the “abolition” of the state. To prune Marxism to such an extent means reducing it to opportunism, for this “interpretation” only leaves a vague notion of a slow, even, gradual change, of absence of leaps and storms, of absence of revolution. The current, widespread, popular, if one may say so, conception of the “withering away” of the state undoubtedly means obscuring, if not repudiating, revolution.

Such an “interpretation”, however, is the crudest distortion of Marxism, advantageous only to the bourgeoisie. In point of theory, it is based on disregard for the most important circumstances and considerations indicated in, say, Engels’ “summary” argument we have just quoted in full.

In the first place, at the very outset of his argument, Engels says that, in seizing state power, the proletariat thereby “abolishes the state as state”. It is not done to ponder over over the meaning of this. Generally, it is either ignored altogether, or is considered to be something in the nature of “Hegelian weakness” on Engels’ part. As a matter of fact, however, these words briefly express the experience of one of the greatest proletarian revolutions, the Paris Commune of 1871, of which we shall speak in greater detail in its proper place. As a matter of fact, Engels speaks here of the proletariat revolution “abolishing” the *bourgeois* state, while the words about the state withering away refer to the remnants of the *proletarian* state *after* the socialist revolution. According to Engels, the bourgeois state does not “wither away”, but is “abolished” by the proletariat in the course of the revolution. What withers away after this revolution is the proletarian state or semi-state.

Secondly, the state is a “special coercive force”. Engels gives this splendid and extremely profound definition here with the utmost lucidity. And from it follows that the “special coercive force” for the suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, of millions of working people by handfuls of the rich, must be replaced by a “special coercive force” for the suppression of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat (the dictatorship of the proletariat). This is precisely what is meant by “abolition of the state as state”. This is precisely the “act” of taking possession of the means of production in the name of society. And it is self-evident that such a replacement of one (bourgeois) “special force” by another (proletarian) “special force” cannot possibly take place in the form of “withering away”.

Thirdly, in speaking of the state “withering away”, and the even more graphic and colorful “dying down of itself”, Engels refers quite clearly and definitely to the period after “the state has taken possession of the means of production in the name of the whole of society”, that is, after the socialist revolution. We all know that the political form of the “state” at that time is the most complete democracy. But it never enters the head of any of the opportunists, who shamelessly distort Marxism, that Engels is consequently speaking here of democracy “dying down of itself”, or “withering away”. This seems very strange at first sight. But it is “incomprehensible” only to those who have not thought about democracy also being a state and, consequently, also disappearing when the state disappears. Revolution alone can “abolish” the bourgeois state. The state in general, i.e., the most complete democracy, can only “wither away”.

Fourthly, after formulating his famous proposition that “the state withers away”, Engels at once explains specifically that this proposition is directed against both the opportunists and the anarchists. In doing this, Engels puts in the forefront that conclusion, drawn from the proposition that “the state withers away”, which is directed against the opportunists.

One can wager that out of every 10,000 persons who have read or heard about the “withering away” of the state, 9,990 are completely unaware, or do not remember, that Engels directed his conclusions from that proposition not against anarchists alone. And of the remaining 10, probably nine do not know the meaning of a “free people’s state” or why an attack on this slogan means an attack on opportunists. This is how history is written! This is how a great revolutionary teaching is imperceptibly falsified and adapted to prevailing philistinism. The conclusion directed against the anarchists has been repeated thousands of times; it has been vulgarized, and rammed into people’s heads in the shallowest form, and has acquired the strength of a prejudice, whereas the conclusion directed against the opportunists has been obscured and “forgotten”!

The “free people’s state” was a programme demand and a catchword current among the German Social-Democrats in the seventies. this catchword is devoid of all political content except that it describes the concept of democracy in a pompous philistine fashion. Insofar as it hinted in a legally permissible manner at a democratic republic, Engels was prepared to “justify” its use “for a time” from an agitational point of view. But it was an opportunist catchword, for it amounted to something more than prettifying bourgeois democracy, and was also failure to understand the socialist criticism of the state in general. We are in favor of a democratic republic as the best form of state for the proletariat under capitalism. But we have no right to forget that wage slavery is the lot of the people even in the most democratic bourgeois republic. Furthermore, every state is a “special force” for the suppression of the oppressed class. Consequently, every state is not “free” and not a “people’s state”. Marx and Engels explained this repeatedly to their party comrades in the seventies.

Fifthly, the same work of Engels’, whose arguments about the withering away of the state everyone remembers, also contains an argument of the significance of violent revolution. Engels’ historical analysis of its role becomes a veritable panegyric on violent revolution. This, “no one remembers”. It is not done in modern socialist parties to talk or even think about the significance of this idea, and it plays no part whatever in their daily propaganda and agitation among the people. And yet it is inseparably bound up with the “withering away” of the state into one harmonious whole.

Here is Engels’ argument:

...That force, however, plays yet another role [other than that of a diabolical power] in history, a revolutionary role; that, in the words of Marx, it is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one, that it is the instrument with which social movement forces its way through and shatters the dead, fossilized political forms – of this there is not a word in Herr Dühring. It is only with sighs and groans that he admits the possibility that force will perhaps be necessary for the overthrow of an economy based on exploitation – unfortunately, because all use of force demoralizes, he says, the person who uses it. And this in Germany, where a violent collision – which may, after all, be forced on the people – would at least have the advantage of wiping out the servility which has penetrated the nation’s mentality following the humiliation of the Thirty Years’ War. And this person’s mode of thought – dull, insipid, and impotent – presumes to impose itself on the most revolutionary party that history has ever known! (p.193, third German edition, Part II, end of Chap.IV)

How can this panegyric on violent revolution, which Engels insistently brought to the attention of the German Social-Democrats between 1878 and 1894, i.e., right up to the time of his death, be combined with the theory of the “withering away” of the state to form a single theory?

Usually the two are combined by means of eclecticism, by an unprincipled or sophistic selection made arbitrarily (or to please the powers that be) of first one, then another argument, and in 99 cases out of 100, if not more, it is the idea of the “withering away” that is placed in the forefront. Dialectics are replaced by eclecticism – this is the most usual, the most wide-spread practice to be met with in present-day official Social-Democratic literature in relation to Marxism. This sort of substitution is, of course, nothing new; it was observed even in the history of classical Greek philosophy. In falsifying Marxism in opportunist fashion, the substitution of eclecticism for dialectics is the easiest way of deceiving the people. It gives an illusory satisfaction; it seems to take into account all sides of the process, all trends of development, all the conflicting influences, and so forth, whereas in

reality it provides no integral and revolutionary conception of the process of social development at all.

We have already said above, and shall show more fully later, that the theory of Marx and Engels of the inevitability of a violent revolution refers to the bourgeois state. The latter cannot be superseded by the proletarian state (the dictatorship of the proletariat) through the process of “withering away”, but, as a general rule, only through a violent revolution. The panegyric Engels sang in its honor, and which fully corresponds to Marx’s repeated statements (see the concluding passages of *The Poverty of Philosophy* and the *Communist Manifesto*, with their proud and open proclamation of the inevitability of a violent revolution; see what Marx wrote nearly 30 years later, in criticizing the Gotha Programme of 1875, when he mercilessly castigated the opportunist character of that programme) – this panegyric is by no means a mere “impulse”, a mere declamation or a polemical sally. The necessity of systematically imbuing the masses with this and precisely this view of violent revolution lies at the root of the entire theory of Marx and Engels. The betrayal of their theory by the now prevailing social-chauvinist and Kautskyite trends expresses itself strikingly in both these trends ignoring such propaganda and agitation.

The supersession of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution. The abolition of the proletarian state, i.e., of the state in general, is impossible except through the process of “withering away”.

A detailed and concrete elaboration of these views was given by Marx and Engels when they studied each particular revolutionary situation, when they analyzed the lessons of the experience of each particular revolution. We shall now pass to this, undoubtedly the most important, part of their theory.

...

Chapter III: The Experience of the Paris Commune

1. What Made the Communards’ Attempt Heroic?

It is well known that in the autumn of 1870, a few months before the Commune, Marx warned the Paris workers that any attempt to overthrow the government would be the folly of despair. But when, in March 1871, a decisive battle was forced upon the workers and they accepted it, when the uprising had become a fact, Marx greeted the proletarian revolution with the greatest enthusiasm, in spite of unfavorable auguries. Marx did not persist in the pedantic attitude of condemning an “untimely” movement as did the ill-famed Russian renegade from marxism, Plekhanov, who in November 1905 wrote encouragingly about the workers’ and peasants’ struggle, but after December 1905 cried, liberal fashion: “They should not have taken up arms.”

Marx, however, was not only enthusiastic about the heroism of the Communards, who, as he expressed it, “stormed heaven”. Although the mass revolutionary movement did not achieve its aim, he regarded it as a historic experience of enormous importance, as a certain advance of the world proletarian revolution, as a practical step that was more important than hundreds of programmes and arguments. Marx endeavored to analyze this experiment, to draw tactical lessons from it and re-examine his theory in the light of it.

The only “correction” Marx thought it necessary to make to the *Communist Manifesto* he made on the basis of the revolutionary experience of the Paris Commune.

The last preface to the new German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, signed by both its authors, is dated June 24, 1872. In this preface the authors, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, say

that the programme of the Communist Manifesto “has in some details become out-of-date”, and the go on to say:

... One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that ‘the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes’...

The authors took the words that are in single quotation marks in this passage from Marx’s book, *The Civil War in France*.

Thus, Marx and Engels regarded one principal and fundamental lesson of the Paris Commune as being of such enormous importance that they introduced it as an important correction into the *Communist Manifesto*.

Most characteristically, it is this important correction that has been distorted by the opportunists, and its meaning probably is not known to nine-tenths, if not ninety-nine-hundredths, of the readers of the *Communist Manifesto*. We shall deal with this distortion more fully farther on, in a chapter devoted specially to distortions. Here it will be sufficient to note that the current, vulgar “interpretation” of Marx’s famous statement just quoted is that Marx here allegedly emphasizes the idea of slow development in contradistinction to the seizure of power, and so on.

As a matter of fact, the exact opposite is the case. Marx’s idea is that the working class must break up, smash the “ready-made state machinery”, and not confine itself merely to laying hold of it.

On April 12, 1871, i.e., just at the time of the Commune, Marx wrote to Kugelmann:

If you look up the last chapter of my Eighteenth Brumaire, you will find that I declare that the next attempt of the French Revolution will be no longer, as before, to transfer the bureaucratic-military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it [Marx’s italics—the original is *zerbrechen*], and this is the precondition for every real people’s revolution on the Continent. And this is what our heroic Party comrades in Paris are attempting. (*Neue Zeit*, Vol.XX, 1, 1901-02, p. 709.) (The letters of Marx to Kugelmann have appeared in Russian in no less than two editions, one of which I edited and supplied with a preface.)

The words, “to smash the bureaucratic-military machine”, briefly express the principal lesson of Marxism regarding the tasks of the proletariat during a revolution in relation to the state. And this is the lesson that has been not only completely ignored, but positively distorted by the prevailing, Kautskyite, “interpretation” of Marxism!

As for Marx’s reference to *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, we have quoted the relevant passage in full above.

It is interesting to note, in particular, two points in the above-quoted argument of Marx. First, he restricts his conclusion to the Continent. This was understandable in 1871, when Britain was still the model of a purely capitalist country, but without a militarist clique and, to a considerable degree, without a bureaucracy. Marx therefore excluded Britain, where a revolution, even a people’s revolution, then seemed possible, and indeed was possible, *without* the precondition of destroying “ready-made state machinery”.

Today, in 1917, at the time of the first great imperialist war, this restriction made by Marx is no longer valid. Both Britain and America, the biggest and the last representatives – in the whole world – of Anglo-Saxon “liberty”, in the sense that they had no militarist cliques and bureaucracy, have completely sunk into the all-European filthy, bloody morass of bureaucratic-military institutions which subordinate everything to themselves, and suppress everything. Today, in Britain and

America, too, “the precondition for every real people’s revolution” is the *smashing*, the *destruction* of the “ready-made state machinery” (made and brought up to the “European”, general imperialist, perfection in those countries in the years 1914-17).

Secondly, particular attention should be paid to Marx’s extremely profound remark that the destruction of the bureaucratic-military state machine is “the precondition for every real people’s revolution”. This idea of a “people’s revolution” seems strange coming from Marx, so that the Russian Plekhanovites and Mensheviks, those followers of Struve who wish to be regarded as Marxists, might possibly declare such an expression to be a “slip of the pen” on Marx’s part. They have reduced Marxism to such a state of wretchedly liberal distortion that nothing exists for them beyond the antithesis between bourgeois revolution and proletarian revolution, and even this antithesis they interpret in an utterly lifeless way.

If we take the revolutions of the 20th century as examples we shall, of course, have to admit that the Portuguese and the Turkish revolutions are both bourgeois revolutions. Neither of them, however, is a “*people’s*” revolution, since in neither does the mass of the people, their vast majority, come out actively, independently, with their own economic and political demands to any noticeable degree. By contrast, although the Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905-07 displayed no such “brilliant” successes as at time fell to the Portuguese and Turkish revolutions, it was undoubtedly a “real people’s” revolution, since the mass of the people, their majority, the very lowest social groups, crushed by oppression and exploitation, rose independently and stamped on the entire course of the revolution the imprint of *their* own demands, *their* attempt to build in their own way a new society in place of the old society that was being destroyed.

In Europe, in 1871, the proletariat did not constitute the majority of the people in any country on the Continent. A “people’s” revolution, one actually sweeping the majority into its stream, could be such only if it embraced both the proletariat and the peasants. These two classes then constituted the “people”. These two classes are united by the fact that the “bureaucratic-military state machine” oppresses, crushes, exploits them. To *smash* this machine, to *break it up*, is truly in the interest of the “people”, of their majority, of the workers and most of the peasants, is “the precondition” for a free alliance of the poor peasant and the proletarians, whereas without such an alliance democracy is unstable and socialist transformation is impossible.

As is well known, the Paris Commune was actually working its way toward such an alliance, although it did not reach its goal owing to a number of circumstances, internal and external.

Consequently, in speaking of a “real people’s revolution”, Marx, without in the least discounting the special features of the petty bourgeois (he spoke a great deal about them and often), took strict account of the actual balance of class forces in most of the continental countries of Europe in 1871. On the other hand, he stated that the “smashing” of the state machine was required by the interests of both the workers and the peasants, that it united them, that it placed before them the common task of removing the “parasite” and of replacing it by something new.

By what exactly?

2. What is to Replace the Smashed State Machine?

In 1847, in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx’s answer to this question was as yet a purely abstract one; to be exact, it was an answer that indicated he tasks, but not the ways of accomplishing them. The answer given in the *Communist Manifesto* was that this machine was to be replaced by “the proletariat organized as the ruling class”, by the “winning of the battle of democracy”.

Marx did not indulge in utopias; he expected the *experience* of the mass movement to provide

the reply to the question as to the specific forms this organisation of the proletariat as the ruling class would assume and as to the exact manner in which this organisation would be combined with the most complete, most consistent “winning of the battle of democracy”.

Marx subjected the experience of the Commune, meagre as it was, to the most careful analysis in *The Civil War in France*. Let us quote the most important passages of this work.

Originating from the Middle Ages, there developed in the 19th century “the centralized state power, with its ubiquitous organs of standing army, police, bureaucracy, clergy, and judicature.” With the development of class antagonisms between capital and labor, “state power assumed more and more the character of a public force organized for the suppression of the working class, of a machine of class rule. After every revolution, which marks an advance in the class struggle, the purely coercive character of the state power stands out in bolder and bolder relief.” After the revolution of 1848-49, state power became “the national war instruments of capital against labor”. The Second Empire consolidated this.

“The direct antithesis to the empire was the Commune.” It was the “specific form” of “a republic that was not only to remove the monarchical form of class rule, but class rule itself.”

What was this “specific” form of the proletarian, socialist republic? What was the state it began to create?

“The first decree of the Commune, therefore, was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people.”

This demand now figures in the programme of every party calling itself socialist. The real worth of their programme, however, is best shown by the behavior of our Social-Revolutionists and Mensheviks, who, right after the revolution of February 27, refused to carry out this demand!

The Commune was formed of the municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage in the various wards of the town, responsible and revocable at any time. The majority of its members were naturally working men, or acknowledged representatives of the working class.... The police, which until then had been the instrument of the Government, was at once stripped of its political attributes, and turned into the responsible, and at all times revocable, agent of the Commune. So were the officials of all other branches of the administration. From the members of the Commune downwards, the public service had to be done at *workmen’s wages*. The privileges and the representation allowances of the high dignitaries of state disappeared along with the high dignitaries themselves.... Having once got rid of the standing army and the police, the instruments of physical force of the old government, the Commune proceeded at once to break the instrument of spiritual suppression, the power of the priests.... The judicial functionaries lost that sham independence... they were thenceforward to be elective, responsible, and revocable.

The Commune, therefore, appears to have replaced the smashed state machine “only” by fuller democracy: abolition of the standing army; all officials to be elected and subject to recall. But as a matter of fact this “only” signifies a gigantic replacement of certain institutions by other institutions of a fundamentally different type. This is exactly a case of “quantity being transformed

into quality”: democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy; from the state (= a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer the state proper.

It is still necessary to suppress the bourgeoisie and crush their resistance. This was particularly necessary for the Commune; and one of the reasons for its defeat was that it did not do this with sufficient determination. The organ of suppression, however, is here the majority of the population, and not a minority, as was always the case under slavery, serfdom, and wage slavery. And since the majority of people itself suppresses its oppressors, a “special force” for suppression is no longer necessary! In this sense, the state begins to wither away. Instead of the special institutions of a privileged minority (privileged officialdom, the chiefs of the standing army), the majority itself can directly fulfil all these functions, and the more the functions of state power are performed by the people as a whole, the less need there is for the existence of this power.

In this connection, the following measures of the Commune, emphasized by Marx, are particularly noteworthy: the abolition of all representation allowances, and of all monetary privileges to officials, the reduction of the remuneration of all servants of the state to the level of “workmen’s wages”. This shows more clearly than anything else the turn from bourgeois to proletarian democracy, from the democracy of the oppressors to that of the oppressed classes, from the state as a “special force” for the suppression of a particular class to the suppression of the oppressors by the general force of the majority of the people – the workers and the peasants. And it is on this particularly striking point, perhaps the most important as far as the problem of the state is concerned, that the ideas of Marx have been most completely ignored! In popular commentaries, the number of which is legion, this is not mentioned. The thing done is to keep silent about it as if it were a piece of old-fashioned “naivete”, just as Christians, after their religion had been given the status of state religion, “forgot” the “naivete” of primitive Christianity with its democratic revolutionary spirit.

The reduction of the remuneration of high state officials seem “simply” a demand of naive, primitive democracy. One of the “founders” of modern opportunism, the ex-Social-Democrat Eduard Bernstein, has more than once repeated the vulgar bourgeois jeers at “primitive” democracy. Like all opportunists, and like the present Kautskyites, he did not understand at all that, first of all, the transition from capitalism to socialism is impossible without a certain “reversion” to “primitive” democracy (for how else can the majority, and then the whole population without exception, proceed to discharge state functions?); and that, secondly, “primitive democracy” based on capitalism and capitalist culture is not the same as primitive democracy in prehistoric or precapitalist times. Capitalist culture has created large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and on this basis the great majority of the functions of the old “state power” have become so simplified and can be reduced to such exceedingly simple operations of registration, filing, and checking that they can be easily performed by every literate person, can quite easily be performed for ordinary “workmen’s wages”, and that these functions can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of “official grandeur”.

All officials, without exception, elected and subject to recall at any time, their salaries reduced to the level of ordinary “workmen’s wages” – these simple and “self-evident” democratic measures, while completely uniting the interests of the workers and the majority of the peasants, at the same time serve as a bridge leading from capitalism to socialism. These measures concern the reorganization of the state, the purely political reorganization of society; but, of course, they acquire their full meaning and significance only in connection with the “expropriation of the expropriators” either bring accomplished or in preparation, i.e., with the transformation of capitalist private ownership

of the means of production into social ownership.

“The Commune,” Marx wrote, “made the catchword of all bourgeois revolutions, cheap government, a reality, by abolishing the two greatest sources of expenditure – the army and the officialdom.”

From the peasants, as from other sections of the petty bourgeoisie, only an insignificant few “rise to the top”, “get on in the world” in the bourgeois sense, i.e., become either well-to-do, bourgeois, or officials in secure and privileged positions. In every capitalist country where there are peasants (as there are in most capitalist countries), the vast majority of them are oppressed by the government and long for its overthrow, long for “cheap” government. This can be achieved only by the proletariat; and by achieving it, the proletariat at the same time takes a step towards the socialist reorganization of the state.

3. Abolition of Parliamentarism

...

It is extremely instructive to note that, in speaking of the function of those officials who are necessary for the Commune and for proletarian democracy, Marx compares them to the workers of “every other employer”, that is, of the ordinary capitalist enterprise, with its “workers, foremen, and accountants”.

There is no trace of utopianism in Marx, in the sense that he made up or invented a “new” society. No, he studied the birth of the new society out of the old, and the forms of transition from the latter to the former, as a mass proletarian movement and tried to draw practical lessons from it. He “Learned” from the Commune, just as all the great revolutionary thinkers learned unhesitatingly from the experience of great movements of the oppressed classes, and never addressed them with pedantic “homilies” (such as Plekhanov’s: “They should not have taken up arms” or Tsereteli’s: “A class must limit itself”).

Abolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely, is out of the question. It is a utopia. But to smash the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will make possible the gradual abolition of all bureaucracy – this is not a utopia, it is the experience of the Commune, the direct and immediate task of the revolutionary proletariat.

Capitalism simplifies the functions of “state” administration; it makes it possible to cast “bossing” aside and to confine the whole matter to the organization of the proletarians (as the ruling class), which will hire “workers, foremen and accountants” in the name of the whole of society.

We are not utopians, we do not “dream” of dispensing at once with all administration, with all subordination. These anarchist dreams, based upon incomprehension of the tasks of the proletarian dictatorship, are totally alien to Marxism, and, as a matter of fact, serve only to postpone the socialist revolution until people are different. No, we want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control, and “foremen and accountants”.

The subordination, however, must be to the armed vanguard of all the exploited and working people, i.e., to the proletariat. A beginning can and must be made at once, overnight, to replace the specific “bossing” of state officials by the simple functions of “foremen and accountants”, functions which are already fully within the ability of the average town dweller and can well be performed for “workmen’s wages”.

We, the workers, shall organize large-scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, relying on our own experience as workers, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers. We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid “foremen and accountants” (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees). This is our proletarian task, this is what we can and must start with in accomplishing the proletarian revolution. Such a beginning, on the basis of large-scale production, will of itself lead to the gradual “withering away” of all bureaucracy, to the gradual creation of an order – an order without inverted commas, an order bearing no similarity to wage slavery – an order under which the functions of control and accounting, becoming more and more simple, will be performed by each in turn, will then become a habit and will finally die out as the special functions of a special section of the population.

A witty German Social-Democrat of the seventies of the last century called the postal service an example of the socialist economic system. This is very true. At the present the postal service is a business organized on the lines of state-capitalist monopoly. Imperialism is gradually transforming all trusts into organizations of a similar type, in which, standing over the “common” people, who are overworked and starved, one has the same bourgeois bureaucracy. But the mechanism of social management is here already to hand. Once we have overthrown the capitalists, crushed the resistance of these exploiters with the iron hand of the armed workers, and smashed the bureaucratic machinery of the modern state, we shall have a splendidly-equipped mechanism, freed from the “parasite”, a mechanism which can very well be set going by the united workers themselves, who will hire technicians, foremen and accountants, and pay them all, as indeed all “state” officials in general, workmen’s wages. Here is a concrete, practical task which can immediately be fulfilled in relation to all trusts, a task whose fulfilment will rid the working people of exploitation, a task which takes account of what the Commune had already begun to practice (particularly in building up the state).

To organize the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than “a workman’s wage”, all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat – that is our immediate aim. This is what will bring about the abolition of parliamentarism and the preservation of representative institutions. This is what will rid the laboring classes of the bourgeoisie’s prostitution of these institutions.

...

5. Abolition of the Parasite State

...

The utopians busied themselves with “discovering” political forms under which the socialist transformation of society was to take place. The anarchists dismissed the question of political forms altogether. The opportunists of present-day Social-Democracy accepted the bourgeois political forms of the parliamentary democratic state as the limit which should not be overstepped; they battered their foreheads praying before this “model”, and denounced as anarchism every desire to break these forms.

Marx deduced from the whole history of socialism and the political struggle that the state was bound to disappear, and that the transitional form of its disappearance (the transition from state to non-state) would be the “proletariat organized as the ruling class”. Marx, however, did not set out to discover the political forms of this future stage. He limited himself to carefully observing French history, to analyzing it, and to drawing the conclusion to which the year 1851 had led, namely, that matters were moving towards destruction of the bourgeois state machine.

And when the mass revolutionary movement of the proletariat burst forth, Marx, in spite of its failure, in spite of its short life and patent weakness, began to study the forms it had discovered.

The Commune is the form “at last discovered” by the proletarian revolution, under which the economic emancipation of labor can take place.

The Commune is the first attempt by a proletarian revolution to smash the bourgeois state machine; and it is the political form “at last discovered”, by which the smashed state machine can and must be replaced.

We shall see further on that the Russian revolutions of 1905 and 1917, in different circumstances and under different conditions, continue the work of the Commune and confirm Marx’s brilliant historical analysis.

Chapter V: The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State

Marx explains this question most thoroughly in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (letter to Bracke, May 5, 1875, which was not published until 1891 when it was printed in *Neue Zeit*, vol. IX, 1, and which has appeared in Russian in a special edition). The polemical part of this remarkable work, which contains a criticism of Lassalleanism, has, so to speak, overshadowed its positive part, namely, the analysis of the connection between the development of communism and the withering away of the state.

...

2. The Transition from Capitalism to Communism

Marx continued:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

Marx bases this conclusion on an analysis of the role played by the proletariat in modern capitalist society, on the data concerning the development of this society, and on the irreconcilability of the antagonistic interests of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

Previously the question was put as follows: to achieve its emancipation, the proletariat must overthrow the bourgeoisie, win political power and establish its revolutionary dictatorship.

Now the question is put somewhat differently: the transition from capitalist society – which is developing towards communism – to communist society is impossible without a “political transition period”, and the state in this period can only be the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.

What, then, is the relation of this dictatorship to democracy?

We have seen that the Communist Manifesto simply places side by side the two concepts: “to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class” and “to win the battle of democracy”. On the basis of all that has been said above, it is possible to determine more precisely how democracy changes in the transition from capitalism to communism.

In capitalist society, providing it develops under the most favourable conditions, we have a more or less complete democracy in the democratic republic. But this democracy is always hemmed in by the narrow limits set by capitalist exploitation, and consequently always remains, in effect, a democracy for the minority, only for the propertied classes, only for the rich. Freedom in capitalist

society always remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners. Owing to the conditions of capitalist exploitation, the modern wage slaves are so crushed by want and poverty that “they cannot be bothered with democracy”, “cannot be bothered with politics”; in the ordinary, peaceful course of events, the majority of the population is debarred from participation in public and political life.

The correctness of this statement is perhaps most clearly confirmed by Germany, because constitutional legality steadily endured there for a remarkably long time – nearly half a century (1871-1914) – and during this period the Social-Democrats were able to achieve far more than in other countries in the way of “utilizing legality”, and organized a larger proportion of the workers into a political party than anywhere else in the world.

What is this largest proportion of politically conscious and active wage slaves that has so far been recorded in capitalist society? One million members of the Social-Democratic Party – out of 15,000,000 wage-workers! Three million organized in trade unions – out of 15,000,000!

Democracy for an insignificant minority, democracy for the rich – that is the democracy of capitalist society. If we look more closely into the machinery of capitalist democracy, we see everywhere, in the “petty” – supposedly petty – details of the suffrage (residential qualifications, exclusion of women, etc.), in the technique of the representative institutions, in the actual obstacles to the right of assembly (public buildings are not for “paupers”!), in the purely capitalist organization of the daily press, etc., etc., – we see restriction after restriction upon democracy. These restrictions, exceptions, exclusions, obstacles for the poor seem slight, especially in the eyes of one who has never known want himself and has never been in close contact with the oppressed classes in their mass life (and nine out of 10, if not 99 out of 100, bourgeois publicists and politicians come under this category); but in their sum total these restrictions exclude and squeeze out the poor from politics, from active participation in democracy.

Marx grasped this essence of capitalist democracy splendidly when, in analyzing the experience of the Commune, he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them in parliament!

But from this capitalist democracy – that is inevitably narrow and stealthily pushes aside the poor, and is therefore hypocritical and false through and through – forward development does not proceed simply, directly and smoothly, towards “greater and greater democracy”, as the liberal professors and petty-bourgeois opportunists would have us believe. No, forward development, i.e., development towards communism, proceeds through the dictatorship of the proletariat, and cannot do otherwise, for the resistance of the capitalist exploiters cannot be broken by anyone else or in any other way.

And the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., the organization of the vanguard of the oppressed as the ruling class for the purpose of suppressing the oppressors, cannot result merely in an expansion of democracy. Simultaneously with an immense expansion of democracy, which for the first time becomes democracy for the poor, democracy for the people, and not democracy for the money-bags, the dictatorship of the proletariat imposes a series of restrictions on the freedom of the oppressors, the exploiters, the capitalists. We must suppress them in order to free humanity from wage slavery, their resistance must be crushed by force; it is clear that there is no freedom and no democracy where there is suppression and where there is violence.

Engels expressed this splendidly in his letter to Bebel when he said, as the reader will remember, that “the proletariat needs the state, not in the interests of freedom but in order to hold down its adversaries, and as soon as it becomes possible to speak of freedom the state as such ceases to exist”.

Democracy for the vast majority of the people, and suppression by force, i.e., exclusion from democracy, of the exploiters and oppressors of the people—this is the change democracy undergoes during the transition from capitalism to communism.

Only in communist society, when the resistance of the capitalists have disappeared, when there are no classes (i.e., when there is no distinction between the members of society as regards their relation to the social means of production), only then “the state... ceases to exist”, and “it becomes possible to speak of freedom”. Only then will a truly complete democracy become possible and be realized, a democracy without any exceptions whatever. And only then will democracy begin to wither away, owing to the simple fact that, freed from capitalist slavery, from the untold horrors, savagery, absurdities, and infamies of capitalist exploitation, people will gradually become accustomed to observing the elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known for centuries and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims. They will become accustomed to observing them without force, without coercion, without subordination, without the special apparatus for coercion called the state.

The expression “the state withers away” is very well-chosen, for it indicates both the gradual and the spontaneous nature of the process. Only habit can, and undoubtedly will, have such an effect; for we see around us on millions of occasions how readily people become accustomed to observing the necessary rules of social intercourse when there is no exploitation, when there is nothing that arouses indignation, evokes protest and revolt, and creates the need for suppression.

And so in capitalist society we have a democracy that is curtailed, wretched, false, a democracy only for the rich, for the minority. The dictatorship of the proletariat, the period of transition to communism, will for the first time create democracy for the people, for the majority, along with the necessary suppression of the exploiters, of the minority. Communism alone is capable of providing really complete democracy, and the more complete it is, the sooner it will become unnecessary and wither away of its own accord.

In other words, under capitalism we have the state in the proper sense of the word, that is, a special machine for the suppression of one class by another, and, what is more, of the majority by the minority. Naturally, to be successful, such an undertaking as the systematic suppression of the exploited majority by the exploiting minority calls for the utmost ferocity and savagery in the matter of suppressing, it calls for seas of blood, through which mankind is actually wading its way in slavery, serfdom and wage labor.

Furthermore, during the transition from capitalism to communism suppression is still necessary, but it is now the suppression of the exploiting minority by the exploited majority. A special apparatus, a special machine for suppression, the “state”, is still necessary, but this is now a transitional state. It is no longer a state in the proper sense of the word; for the suppression of the minority of exploiters by the majority of the wage slaves of yesterday is comparatively so easy, simple and natural a task that it will entail far less bloodshed than the suppression of the risings of slaves, serfs or wage-laborers, and it will cost mankind far less. And it is compatible with the extension of democracy to such an overwhelming majority of the population that the need for a special machine of suppression will begin to disappear. Naturally, the exploiters are unable to suppress the people without a highly complex machine for performing this task, but the people can suppress the exploiters even with a very simple “machine”, almost without a “machine”, without a special apparatus, by the simple organization of the armed people (such as the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, we would remark, running ahead).

Lastly, only communism makes the state absolutely unnecessary, for there is nobody to be suppressed – “nobody” in the sense of a class, of a systematic struggle against a definite section of

the population. We are not utopians, and do not in the least deny the possibility and inevitability of excesses on the part of *individual persons*, or the need to stop such excesses. In the first place, however, no special machine, no special apparatus of suppression, is needed for this: this will be done by the armed people themselves, as simply and as readily as any crowd of civilized people, even in modern society, interferes to put a stop to a scuffle or to prevent a woman from being assaulted. And, secondly, we know that the fundamental social cause of excesses, which consist in the violation of the rules of social intercourse, is the exploitation of the people, their want and their poverty. With the removal of this chief cause, excesses will inevitably begin to “wither away”. We do not know how quickly and in what succession, but we do know they will wither away. With their withering away the state will also wither away.

Without building utopias, Marx defined more fully what can be defined now regarding this future, namely, the differences between the lower and higher phases (levels, stages) of communist society.

3. The First Phase of Communist Society

In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx goes into detail to disprove Lassalle’s idea that under socialism the worker will receive the “undiminished” or “full product of his labor”. Marx shows that from the whole of the social labor of society there must be deducted a reserve fund, a fund for the expansion of production, a fund for the replacement of the “wear and tear” of machinery, and so on. Then, from the means of consumption must be deducted a fund for administrative expenses, for schools, hospitals, old people’s homes, and so on.

Instead of Lassalle’s hazy, obscure, general phrase (“the full product of his labor to the worker”), Marx makes a sober estimate of exactly how socialist society will have to manage its affairs. Marx proceeds to make a concrete analysis of the conditions of life of a society in which there will be no capitalism, and says:

What we have to deal with here [in analyzing the programme of the workers’ party] is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it comes.

It is this communist society, which has just emerged into the light of day out of the womb of capitalism and which is in every respect stamped with the birthmarks of the old society, that Marx terms the “first”, or lower, phase of communist society.

The means of production are no longer the private property of individuals. The means of production belong to the whole of society. Every member of society, performing a certain part of the socially-necessary work, receives a certificate from society to the effect that he has done a certain amount of work. And with this certificate he receives from the public store of consumer goods a corresponding quantity of products. After a deduction is made of the amount of labor which goes to the public fund, every worker, therefore, receives from society as much as he has given to it.

“Equality” apparently reigns supreme.

But when Lassalle, having in view such a social order (usually called socialism, but termed by Marx the first phase of communism), says that this is “equitable distribution”, that this is “the equal right of all to an equal product of labor”, Lassalle is mistaken and Marx exposes the mistake.

“Hence, the equal right,” says Marx, in this case still certainly conforms to “bourgeois law”, which, like all law, implies inequality. All law is an application of an equal measure to different people who in fact are not alike, are not equal to one another. That is why the “equal right” is violation of equality and an injustice. In fact, everyone, having performed as much social labor as another, receives an equal share of the social product (after the above-mentioned deductions).

But people are not alike: one is strong, another is weak; one is married, another is not; one has more children, another has less, and so on. And the conclusion Marx draws is:

... With an equal performance of labor, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on. To avoid all these defects, the right instead of being equal would have to be unequal.

The first phase of communism, therefore, cannot yet provide justice and equality; differences, and unjust differences, in wealth will still persist, but the exploitation of man by man will have become impossible because it will be impossible to seize the means of production – the factories, machines, land, etc. – and make them private property. In smashing Lassalle’s petty-bourgeois, vague phrases about “equality” and “justice” in general, Marx shows the course of development of communist society, which is compelled to abolish at first only the “injustice” of the means of production seized by individuals, and which is unable at once to eliminate the other injustice, which consists in the distribution of consumer goods “according to the amount of labor performed” (and not according to needs).

The vulgar economists, including the bourgeois professors and “our” Tugan, constantly reproach the socialists with forgetting the inequality of people and with “dreaming” of eliminating this inequality. Such a reproach, as we see, only proves the extreme ignorance of the bourgeois ideologists.

Marx not only most scrupulously takes account of the inevitable inequality of men, but he also takes into account the fact that the mere conversion of the means of production into the common property of the whole society (commonly called “socialism”) does not remove the defects of distribution and the inequality of “bourgeois laws” which continues to prevail so long as products are divided “according to the amount of labor performed”. Continuing, Marx says:

But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged, after prolonged birth pangs, from capitalist society. Law can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby.

And so, in the first phase of communist society (usually called socialism) “bourgeois law” is not abolished in its entirety, but only in part, only in proportion to the economic revolution so far attained, i.e., only in respect of the means of production. “Bourgeois law” recognizes them as the private property of individuals. Socialism converts them into common property. To that extent – and to that extent alone – “bourgeois law” disappears.

However, it persists as far as its other part is concerned; it persists in the capacity of regulator (determining factor) in the distribution of products and the allotment of labor among the members of society. The socialist principle, “He who does not work shall not eat”, is already realized; the other socialist principle, “An equal amount of products for an equal amount of labor”, is also already realized. But this is not yet communism, and it does not yet abolish “bourgeois law”, which gives unequal individuals, in return for unequal (really unequal) amounts of labor, equal amounts of products.

This is a “defect”, says Marx, but it is unavoidable in the first phase of communism; for if we are not to indulge in utopianism, we must not think that having overthrown capitalism people will at once learn to work for society without any rules of law. Besides, the abolition of capitalism does not immediately create the economic prerequisites for such a change.

Now, there are no other rules than those of “bourgeois law”. To this extent, therefore, there still remains the need for a state, which, while safeguarding the common ownership of the means of production, would safeguard equality in labor and in the distribution of products.

The state withers away insofar as there are no longer any capitalists, any classes, and, consequently, no class can be suppressed.

But the state has not yet completely withered away, since it still remains the safeguarding of “bourgeois law”, which sanctifies actual inequality. For the state to wither away completely, complete communism is necessary.

4. The Higher Phase of Communist Society

Marx continues:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and with it also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished, after labor has become not only a livelihood but life’s prime want, after the productive forces have increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois law be left behind in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!

Only now can we fully appreciate the correctness of Engels’ remarks mercilessly ridiculing the absurdity of combining the words “freedom” and “state”. So long as the state exists there is no freedom. When there is freedom, there will be no state.

The economic basis for the complete withering away of the state is such a high state of development of communism at which the antithesis between mental and physical labor disappears, at which there consequently disappears one of the principal sources of modern social inequality – a source, moreover, which cannot on any account be removed immediately by the mere conversion of the means of production into public property, by the mere expropriation of the capitalists.

This expropriation will make it possible for the productive forces to develop to a tremendous extent. And when we see how incredibly capitalism is already retarding this development, when we see how much progress could be achieved on the basis of the level of technique already attained, we are entitled to say with the fullest confidence that the expropriation of the capitalists will inevitably result in an enormous development of the productive forces of human society. But how rapidly this development will proceed, how soon it will reach the point of breaking away from the division of labor, of doing away with the antithesis between mental and physical labor, of transforming labor into “life’s prime want” – we do not and cannot know.

That is why we are entitled to speak only of the inevitable withering away of the state, emphasizing the protracted nature of this process and its dependence upon the rapidity of development of the higher phase of communism, and leaving the question of the time required for, or the concrete forms of, the withering away quite open, because there is no material for answering these questions.

The state will be able to wither away completely when society adopts the rule: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”, i.e., when people have become so accustomed to observing the fundamental rules of social intercourse and when their labor has become

so productive that they will voluntarily work according to their ability. “The narrow horizon of bourgeois law”, which compels one to calculate with the heartlessness of a Shylock whether one has not worked half an hour more than anybody else – this narrow horizon will then be left behind. There will then be no need for society, in distributing the products, to regulate the quantity to be received by each; each will take freely “according to his needs”.

From the bourgeois point of view, it is easy to declare that such a social order is “sheer utopia” and to sneer at the socialists for promising everyone the right to receive from society, without any control over the labor of the individual citizen, any quantity of truffles, cars, pianos, etc. Even to this day, most bourgeois “savants” confine themselves to sneering in this way, thereby betraying both their ignorance and their selfish defence of capitalism.

Ignorance – for it has never entered the head of any socialist to “promise” that the higher phase of the development of communism will arrive; as for the greatest socialists’ forecast that it will arrive, it presupposes not the present ordinary run of people, who, like the seminary students in Pomyalovsky’s stories, are capable of damaging the stocks of public wealth “just for fun”, and of demanding the impossible.

Until the “higher” phase of communism arrives, the socialists demand the strictest control by society and by the state over the measure of labor and the measure of consumption; but this control must start with the expropriation of the capitalists, with the establishment of workers’ control over the capitalists, and must be exercised not by a state of bureaucrats, but by a state of armed workers.

The selfish defence of capitalism by the bourgeois ideologists (and their hangers-on, like the Tseretelis, Chernovs, and Co.) consists in that they substitute arguing and talk about the distant future for the vital and burning question of present-day politics, namely, the expropriation of the capitalists, the conversion of all citizens into workers and other employees of one huge “syndicate” – the whole state – and the complete subordination of the entire work of this syndicate to a genuinely democratic state, the state of the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.

In fact, when a learned professor, followed by the philistine, followed in turn by the Tseretelis and Chernovs, talks of wild utopias, of the demagogic promises of the Bolsheviks, of the impossibility of “introducing” socialism, it is the higher stage, or phase, of communism he has in mind, which no one has ever promised or even thought to “introduce”, because, generally speaking, it cannot be “introduced”.

And this brings us to the question of the scientific distinction between socialism and communism which Engels touched on in his above-quoted argument about the incorrectness of the name “Social-Democrat”. Politically, the distinction between the first, or lower, and the higher phase of communism will in time, probably, be tremendous. But it would be ridiculous to recognize this distinction now, under capitalism, and only individual anarchists, perhaps, could invest it with primary importance (if there still are people among the anarchists who have learned nothing from the “Plekhanov” conversion of the Kropotkins, of Grave, Cornéliseen, and other “stars” of anarchism into social-chauvinists or “anarcho-trenchists”, as Ghe, one of the few anarchists who have still preserved a sense of humor and a conscience, has put it).

But the scientific distinction between socialism and communism is clear. What is usually called socialism was termed by Marx the “first”, or lower, phase of communist society. Insofar as the means of production becomes common property, the word “communism” is also applicable here, providing we do not forget that this is not complete communism. The great significance of Marx’s explanations is that here, too, he consistently applies materialist dialectics, the theory of development, and regards communism as something which develops out of capitalism. Instead of scholastically invented, “concocted” definitions and fruitless disputes over words (What is socialism? What is

communism?), Marx gives an analysis of what might be called the stages of the economic maturity of communism.

In its first phase, or first stage, communism cannot as yet be fully mature economically and entirely free from traditions or vestiges of capitalism. Hence the interesting phenomenon that communism in its first phase retains “the narrow horizon of bourgeois law”. Of course, bourgeois law in regard to the distribution of consumer goods inevitably presupposes the existence of the bourgeois state, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of enforcing the observance of the rules of law.

It follows that under communism there remains for a time not only bourgeois law, but even the bourgeois state, without the bourgeoisie!

This may sound like a paradox or simply a dialectical conundrum of which Marxism is often accused by people who have not taken the slightest trouble to study its extraordinarily profound content.

But in fact, remnants of the old, surviving in the new, confront us in life at every step, both in nature and in society. And Marx did not arbitrarily insert a scrap of “bourgeois” law into communism, but indicated what is economically and politically inevitable in a society emerging out of the womb of capitalism.

Democracy means equality. The great significance of the proletariat’s struggle for equality and of equality as a slogan will be clear if we correctly interpret it as meaning the abolition of classes. But democracy means only formal equality. And as soon as equality is achieved for all members of society in relation to ownership of the means of production, that is, equality of labor and wages, humanity will inevitably be confronted with the question of advancing further from formal equality to actual equality, i.e., to the operation of the rule “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs”. By what stages, by means of what practical measures humanity will proceed to this supreme aim we do not and cannot know. But it is important to realize how infinitely mendacious is the ordinary bourgeois conception of socialism as something lifeless, rigid, fixed once and for all, whereas in reality only socialism will be the beginning of a rapid, genuine, truly mass forward movement, embracing first the majority and then the whole of the population, in all spheres of public and private life.

Democracy is of enormous importance to the working class in its struggle against the capitalists for its emancipation. But democracy is by no means a boundary not to be overstepped; it is only one of the stages on the road from feudalism to capitalism, and from capitalism to communism.

Democracy is a form of the state, it represents, on the one hand, the organized, systematic use of force against persons; but, on the other hand, it signifies the formal recognition of equality of citizens, the equal right of all to determine the structure of, and to administer, the state. This, in turn, results in the fact that, at a certain stage in the development of democracy, it first welds together the class that wages a revolutionary struggle against capitalism – the proletariat, and enables it to crush, smash to atoms, wipe off the face of the earth the bourgeois, even the republican-bourgeois, state machine, the standing army, the police and the bureaucracy and to substitute for them a more democratic state machine, but a state machine nevertheless, in the shape of armed workers who proceed to form a militia involving the entire population.

Here “quantity turns into quality”: such a degree of democracy implies overstepping the boundaries of bourgeois society and beginning its socialist reorganization. If really all take part in the administration of the state, capitalism cannot retain its hold. The development of capitalism, in turn, creates the preconditions that enable really “all” to take part in the administration of the state. Some of these preconditions are: universal literacy, which has already been achieved in a

number of the most advanced capitalist countries, then the “training and disciplining” of millions of workers by the huge, complex, socialized apparatus of the postal service, railways, big factories, large-scale commerce, banking, etc., etc.

Given these economic preconditions, it is quite possible, after the overthrow of the capitalists and the bureaucrats, to proceed immediately, overnight, to replace them in the control over production and distribution, in the work of keeping account of labor and products, by the armed workers, by the whole of the armed population. (The question of control and accounting should not be confused with the question of the scientifically trained staff of engineers, agronomists, and so on. These gentlemen are working today in obedience to the wishes of the capitalists and will work even better tomorrow in obedience to the wishes of the armed workers.)

Accounting and control – that is *mainly* what is needed for the “smooth working”, for the proper functioning, of the *first phase* of communist society. *All* citizens are transformed into hired employees of the state, which consists of the armed workers. *All* citizens becomes employees and workers of a *single* countrywide state “syndicate”. All that is required is that they should work equally, do their proper share of work, and get equal pay; the accounting and control necessary for this have been *simplified* by capitalism to the utmost and reduced to the extraordinarily simple operations – which any literate person can perform – of supervising and recording, knowledge of the four rules of arithmetic, and issuing appropriate receipts.

When the *majority* of the people begin independently and everywhere to keep such accounts and exercise such control over the capitalists (now converted into employees) and over the intellectual gentry who preserve their capitalist habits, this control will really become universal, general, and popular; and there will be no getting away from it, there will be “nowhere to go”.

The whole of society will have become a single office and a single factory, with equality of labor and pay.

But this “factory” discipline, which the proletariat, after defeating the capitalists, after overthrowing the exploiters, will extend to the whole of society, is by no means our ideal, or our ultimate goal. It is only a necessary *step* for thoroughly cleansing society of all the infamies and abominations of capitalist exploitation, *and for further* progress.

From the moment all members of society, or at least the vast majority, have learned to administer the state *themselves*, have taken this work into their own hands, have organized control over the insignificant capitalist minority, over the gentry who wish to preserve their capitalist habits and over the workers who have been thoroughly corrupted by capitalism – from this moment the need for government of any kind begins to disappear altogether. The more complete the democracy, the nearer the moment when it becomes unnecessary. The more democratic the “state” which consists of the armed workers, and which is “no longer a state in the proper sense of the word”, the more rapidly *every form* of state begins to wither away.

For when *all* have learned to administer and actually to independently administer social production, independently keep accounts and exercise control over the parasites, the sons of the wealthy, the swindlers and other “guardians of capitalist traditions”, the escape from this popular accounting and control will inevitably become so incredibly difficult, such a rare exception, and will probably be accompanied by such swift and severe punishment (for the armed workers are practical men and not sentimental intellectuals, and they scarcely allow anyone to trifle with them), that the *necessity* of observing the simple, fundamental rules of the community will very soon become a *habit*.

Then the door will be thrown wide open for the transition from the first phase of communist society to its higher phase, and with it to the complete withering away of the state.

5.3 Rosa Luxemburg, The Russian Revolution (1918)

Chapter 6: The Problem of Dictatorship

Lenin says [in *The State and Revolution: The Transition from Capitalism to Communism*] the bourgeois state is an instrument of oppression of the working class; the socialist state, of the bourgeoisie. To a certain extent, he says, it is only the capitalist state stood on its head. This simplified view misses the most essential thing: bourgeois class rule has no need of the political training and education of the entire mass of the people, at least not beyond certain narrow limits. But for the proletarian dictatorship that is the life element, the very air without which it is not able to exist.

“Thanks to the open and direct struggle for governmental power,” writes Trotsky, “the laboring masses accumulate in the shortest time a considerable amount of political experience and advance quickly from one stage to another of their development.”

Here Trotsky refutes himself and his own friends. Just because this is so, they have blocked up the fountain of political experience and the source of this rising development by their suppression of public life! Or else we would have to assume that experience and development were necessary up to the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, and then, having reached their highest peak, become superfluous thereafter. (Lenin’s speech: Russia is won for socialism!!!)

In reality, the opposite is true! It is the very giant tasks which the Bolsheviks have undertaken with courage and determination that demand the most intensive political training of the masses and the accumulation of experience.

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of “justice” but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when “freedom” becomes a special privilege.

The Bolsheviks themselves will not want, with hand on heart, to deny that, step by step, they have to feel out the ground, try out, experiment, test now one way now another, and that a good many of their measures do not represent priceless pearls of wisdom. Thus it must and will be with all of us when we get to the same point – even if the same difficult circumstances may not prevail everywhere.

The tacit assumption underlying the Lenin-Trotsky theory of dictatorship is this: that the socialist transformation is something for which a ready-made formula lies completed in the pocket of the revolutionary party, which needs only to be carried out energetically in practice. This is, unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately – not the case. Far from being a sum of ready-made prescriptions which have only to be applied, the practical realization of socialism as an economic, social and juridical system is something which lies completely hidden in the mists of the future. What we possess in our program is nothing but a few main signposts which indicate the general direction in which to look for the necessary measures, and the indications are mainly negative in character at that. Thus we know more or less what we must eliminate at the outset in order to free the road for a socialist economy. But when it comes to the nature of the thousand concrete, practical measures, large and small, necessary to introduce socialist principles into economy, law and all social relationships, there is no key in any socialist party program or textbook. That is not a shortcoming but rather the very thing that makes scientific socialism superior to the utopian varieties.

The socialist system of society should only be, and can only be, a historical product, born out of the school of its own experiences, born in the course of its realization, as a result of the developments of living history, which – just like organic nature of which, in the last analysis, it forms a part – has the fine habit of always producing along with any real social need the means to its satisfaction, along with the task simultaneously the solution. However, if such is the case, then it is clear that socialism by its very nature cannot be decreed or introduced by *ukase*. It has as its prerequisite a number of measures of force – against property, etc. The negative, the tearing down, can be decreed; the building up, the positive, cannot. New Territory. A thousand problems. Only experience is capable of correcting and opening new ways. Only unobstructed, effervescent life falls into a thousand new forms and improvisations, brings to light creative new force, itself corrects all mistaken attempts. The public life of countries with limited freedom is so poverty-stricken, so miserable, so rigid, so unfruitful, precisely because, through the exclusion of democracy, it cuts off the living sources of all spiritual riches and progress. (Proof: the year 1905 and the months from February to October 1917.) There it was political in character; the same thing applies to economic and social life also. The whole mass of the people must take part in it. Otherwise, socialism will be decreed from behind a few official desks by a dozen intellectuals.

Public control is indispensably necessary. Otherwise the exchange of experiences remains only with the closed circle of the officials of the new regime. Corruption becomes inevitable. (Lenin's words, Bulletin No.29) Socialism in life demands a complete spiritual transformation in the masses degraded by centuries of bourgeois rule. Social instincts in place of egotistical ones, mass initiative in place of inertia, idealism which conquers all suffering, etc., etc. No one knows this better, describes it more penetratingly; repeats it more stubbornly than Lenin. But he is completely mistaken in the means he employs. Decree, dictatorial force of the factory overseer, draconian penalties, rule by terror – all these things are but palliatives. The only way to a rebirth is the school of public life itself, the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion. It is rule by terror which demoralizes.

When all this is eliminated, what really remains? In place of the representative bodies created by general, popular elections, Lenin and Trotsky have laid down the soviets as the only true representation of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. Among them, in reality only a dozen outstanding heads do the leading and an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat but only the dictatorship of a handful of politicians, that is a dictatorship in the bourgeois sense, in the sense of the rule of the Jacobins (the postponement of the Soviet Congress from three-month periods to six-month periods!) Yes, we can go even further: such conditions must inevitably cause a brutalization of public life: attempted assassinations, shooting of hostages, etc. (Lenin's speech on discipline and corruption.)

Chapter 7: The Struggle Against Corruption

A problem which is of great importance in every revolution is that of the struggle with the *Lumpenproletariat*. We in Germany too, as everywhere else, will have this problem to reckon with. The

Lumpenproletariat element is deeply imbedded in bourgeois society. It is not merely a special section, a sort of social wastage which grows enormously when the walls of the social order are falling down, but rather an integral part of the social whole. Events in Germany – and more or less in other countries – have shown how easily all sections of bourgeois society are subject to such degeneration. The gradations between commercial profiteering, fictitious deals, adulteration of foodstuffs, cheating, official embezzlement, theft, burglary and robbery, flow into one another in such fashion that the boundary line between honorable citizenry and the penitentiary has disappeared. In this the same phenomenon is repeated as in the regular and rapid degeneration of bourgeois dignitaries when they are transplanted to an alien social soil in an overseas colonial setting. With the stripping off of conventional barriers and props for morality and law, bourgeois society itself falls victim to direct and limitless degeneration [*Verlumpung*], for its innermost law of life is the profoundest of immoralities, namely, the exploitation of man by man. The proletarian revolution will have to struggle with this enemy and instrument of counter-revolution on every hand.

And yet, in this connection too, terror is dull, nay, a two-edged sword. The harshest measures of martial law are impotent against outbreaks of the *lumpenproletarian* sickness. Indeed, every persistent regime of martial law leads inevitably to arbitrariness, and every form of arbitrariness tends to deprave society. In this regard also, the only effective means in the hands of the proletarian revolution are: radical measures of a political and social character, the speediest possible transformation of the social guarantees of the life of the masses – the kindling of revolutionary idealism, which can be maintained over any length of time only through the intensively active life of the masses themselves under conditions of unlimited political freedom.

As the free action of the sun's rays is the most effective purifying and healing remedy against infections and disease germs, so the only healing and purifying sun is the revolution itself and its renovating principle, the spiritual life, activity and initiative of the masses which is called into being by it and which takes the form of the broadest political freedom.

Chapter 8: Democracy and Dictatorship

The basic error of the Lenin-Trotsky theory is that they too, just like Kautsky, oppose dictatorship to democracy. “Dictatorship *or* democracy” is the way the question is put by Bolsheviks and Kautsky alike. The latter naturally decides in favor of “democracy,” that is, of bourgeois democracy, precisely because he opposes it to the alternative of the socialist revolution. Lenin and Trotsky, on the other hand, decide in favor of dictatorship in contradistinction to democracy, and thereby, in favor of the dictatorship of a handful of persons, that is, in favor of dictatorship on the bourgeois model. They are two opposite poles, both alike being far removed from a genuine socialist policy. The proletariat, when it seizes power, can never follow the good advice of Kautsky, given on the pretext of the “unripeness of the country,” the advice being to renounce socialist revolution and devote itself to democracy. It cannot follow this advice without betraying thereby itself, the International, and the revolution. It should and must at once undertake socialist measures in the most energetic, unyielding and unhesitant fashion, in other words, exercise a dictatorship, but a dictatorship of the *class*, not of a party or of a clique “dictatorship of the class, that means in the broadest possible form on the basis of the most active, unlimited participation of the mass of the people, of unlimited democracy.

“As Marxists,” writes Trotsky, “we have never been idol worshippers of formal democracy.” Surely, we have never been idol worshippers of socialism or Marxism either. Does it follow from this that we may throw socialism on the scrap-heap, *à la* Cunow, Lensch and Parvus [i.e. move to

the right], if it becomes uncomfortable for us? Trotsky and Lenin are the living refutation of this answer.

“We have never been idol-worshippers of formal democracy.” All that that really means is: We have always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of *bourgeois* democracy; we have always revealed the hard kernel of social inequality and lack of freedom hidden under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom – not in order to reject the latter but to spur the working class into not being satisfied with the shell, but rather, by conquering political power, to create a socialist democracy to replace bourgeois democracy – not to eliminate democracy altogether.

But socialist democracy is not something which begins only in the promised land after the foundations of socialist economy are created; it does not come as some sort of Christmas present for the worthy people who, in the interim, have loyally supported a handful of socialist dictators. Socialist democracy begins simultaneously with the beginnings of the destruction of class rule and of the construction of socialism. It begins at the very moment of the seizure of power by the socialist party. It is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yes, dictatorship! But this dictatorship consists in the *manner of applying democracy*, not in its *elimination*, but in energetic, resolute attacks upon the well-entrenched rights and economic relationships of bourgeois society, without which a socialist transformation cannot be accomplished. But this dictatorship must be the work of the *class* and not of a little leading minority in the name of the class – that is, it must proceed step by step out of the active participation of the masses; it must be under their direct influence, subjected to the control of complete public activity; it must arise out of the growing political training of the mass of the people.

Doubtless the Bolsheviks would have proceeded in this very way were it not that they suffered under the frightful compulsion of the world war, the German occupation and all the abnormal difficulties connected therewith, things which were inevitably bound to distort any socialist policy, however imbued it might be with the best intentions and the finest principles.

A crude proof of this is provided by the use of terror to so wide an extent by the Soviet government, especially in the most recent period just before the collapse of German imperialism, and just after the attempt on the life of the German ambassador. The commonplace to the effect that revolutions are not pink teas is in itself pretty inadequate.

Everything that happens in Russia is comprehensible and represents an inevitable chain of causes and effects, the starting point and end term of which are: the failure of the German proletariat and the occupation of Russia by German imperialism. It would be demanding something superhuman from Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat and a flourishing socialist economy. By their determined revolutionary stand, their exemplary strength in action, and their unbreakable loyalty to international socialism, they have contributed whatever could possibly be contributed under such devilishly hard conditions. The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics. When they get in their own light in this way, and hide their genuine, unquestionable historical service under the bushel of false steps forced on them by necessity, they render a poor service to international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion – in the last analysis only by-products of the bankruptcy of international socialism in the present world war.

Let the German Government Socialists cry that the rule of the Bolsheviks in Russia is a distorted

expression of the dictatorship of the proletariat. If it was or is such, that is only because it is a product of the behavior of the German proletariat, in itself a distorted expression of the socialist class struggle. All of us are subject to the laws of history, and it is only internationally that the socialist order of society can be realized. The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle.

What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescencies in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: "I have dared!"

This is the essential and *enduring* in Bolshevik policy. In *this* sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labor in the entire world. In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to "Bolshevism."

Week 6

Left-Wing Communism

The termination of World War I brought profound changes to the state system in Central and Eastern Europe. The Austro-Hungarian empire was dissolved, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled, and the German monarchy was overthrown... to say nothing of the Russian Revolution. These realignments coincided with various national and revolutionary movements in the region.

In Germany, SPD functionaries again betrayed the revolutionary movement. The SPD, now in power, collaborated in putting down several Left revolts in the next few years, leading to the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg, among other setbacks.

The Bolsheviks established the Comintern (Communist International aka Third International) in order to replicate the Russian Revolution elsewhere by means of Moscow-controlled Communist parties using Bolshevik strategy and organization. The establishment of these national Communist parties coupled with the decline in prestige of the parties of the Second International led to the formation and splitting of various Left political parties. Germany saw an alphabet soup of parties emerge: the Communist KPD, the left-of-SPD Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), the left communist KAPD which split from the KPD – these are but a few. In other countries, generally speaking, tensions arose between Communist and non-Communist Left parties over control of the socialist movement.

The readings for this week, all written in 1920, reveal the differences that polarized the Left in the postwar era. Anton Pannekoek's *World Revolution and Communist Tactics* criticizes the Bolsheviks from a left communist perspective. Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder* (distributed to delegates at the Comintern's Second Congress) was partially a response to Pannekoek, who he refers to as "Horner." Herman Gorter, another left communist, responds to Lenin's pamphlet in *Open Letter to Comrade Lenin*. The final reading is the Comintern's 21 requirements of a Communist party for admission into the Comintern. Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Comintern, presented these requirements at the Second Congress.

The Eley chapter for this week is 9.

6.1 Anton Pannekoek, World Revolution and Communist Tactics (1920)

I

The transformation of capitalism into communism is brought about by two forces, one material and the other mental, the latter having its origins in the former. The material development of the economy generates consciousness, and this activates the will to revolution. Marxist science, arising as a function of the general tendencies of capitalist development, forms first the theory of the socialist party and subsequently that of the communist party, and it endows the revolutionary movement with a profound and vigorous intellectual unity. While this theory is gradually penetrating one section of the proletariat, the masses' own experiences are bound to foster practical recognition that capitalism is no longer viable to an increasing extent. World war and rapid economic collapse now make revolution objectively necessary before the masses have grasped communism intellectually: and this contradiction is at the root of the contradictions, hesitations and setbacks which make the revolution a long and painful process. Nevertheless, theory itself now gains new momentum and rapidly takes a hold on the masses; but both these processes are inevitably held up by the practical problems which have suddenly risen up so massively.

As far as Western Europe is concerned, the development of the revolution is mainly determined by two forces: the collapse of the capitalist economy and the example of Soviet Russia. The reasons why the proletariat was able to achieve victory so quickly and with such relative ease in Russia – the weakness of the bourgeoisie, the alliance with the peasantry, the fact that the revolution took place during the war – need not be elaborated here. The example of a state in which working people are the rulers, where they have abolished capitalism and are engaged in building communism, could not but make a great impression upon the proletariat of the entire world. Of course, this example would not in itself have been sufficient to spur the workers in other countries on to proletarian revolution. The human mind is most strongly influenced by the effects of its own material environment; so that if indigenous capitalism had retained all its old strength, the news from far-away Russia would have made little impression. “Full of respectful admiration, but in a timid, petty-bourgeois way, without the courage to save themselves, Russia and humanity as a whole by taking action” – this was how the masses struck Rutgers upon his return to Western Europe from Russia. When the war came to an end, everyone here hoped for a rapid upturn in the economy, and a lying press depicted Russia as a place of chaos and barbarism; and so the masses bided their time. But since then, the opposite has come about: chaos has spread in the traditional home of civilisation, while the new order in Russia is showing increasing strength. Now the masses are stirring here as well.

Economic collapse is the most powerful spur to revolution. Germany and Austria are already completely shattered and pauperised economically, Italy and France are in inexorable decline. England has suffered so badly that it is doubtful whether its government's vigorous attempts at reconstruction can avert collapse, and in America the first threatening signs of crisis are appearing. And in each country, more or less in this same order, unrest is growing in the masses; they are struggling against impoverishment in great strike-movements which hit the economy even harder; these struggles are gradually developing into a conscious revolutionary struggle, and, without being communists by conviction, the masses are more and more following the path which communism shows them, for practical necessity is driving them in that direction.

With the growth of this necessity and mood, carried by them, so to speak, the communist vanguard has been developing in these countries; this vanguard recognises the goals clearly and

regroups itself in the Third International. The distinguishing feature of this developing process of revolution is a sharp separation of communism from socialism, in both ideological and organisational terms. This separation is most marked in the countries of Central Europe precipitated into economic crisis by the Treaty of Versailles, where a social-democratic regime was necessary to save the bourgeois state. The crisis is so profound and irremediable there that the mass of radical social-democratic workers, the USP, are pressing for affiliation to Moscow, although they still largely hold to the old social-democratic methods, traditions, slogans and leaders. In Italy, the entire social-democratic party has joined the Third International; a militant revolutionary mood among the masses, who are engaged in constant small-scale warfare against government and bourgeoisie, permits us to overlook the theoretical mixture of socialist, syndicalist and communist perspectives. In France, communist groups have only recently detached themselves from the social-democratic party and the trade-union movement, and are now moving towards the formation of a communist party. In England, the profound effect of the war upon the old, familiar conditions has generated a communist movement, as yet consisting of several groups and parties of different origins and new organisational formations. In America, two communist parties have detached themselves from the Social-Democratic Party, while the latter has also aligned itself with Moscow.

Soviet Russia's unexpected resilience to the onslaughts of reaction has both compelled the Entente to negotiate and also made a new and powerful impression upon the labour parties of the West. The Second International is breaking up; a general movement of the centre groups towards Moscow has set in under the impulsion of the growing revolutionary mood of the masses. These groups have adopted the new name of communists without their former perspectives having greatly altered, and they are transferring the conceptions and methods of the old social democrats into the new international. As a sign that these countries have now become more ripe for revolution, a phenomenon precisely opposite to the original one is now appearing: with their entry into the Third International or declaration in favour of its principles, as in the case of the USP mentioned above, the sharp distinction between communists and social democrats is once again fading. Whatever attempts are made to keep such parties formally outside the Third International in an effort to conserve some firmness of principle, they nevertheless insinuate themselves into the leadership of each country's revolutionary movement, maintaining their influence over the militant masses by paying lip-service to the new slogans. This is how every ruling stratum behaves: rather than allow itself to be cut off from the masses, it becomes "revolutionary" itself, in order to deflate the revolution as far as possible by its influence. And many communists tend to see only the increased strength thus accruing to us, and not also the increase in vulnerability.

With the appearance of communism and the Russian example, the proletarian revolution seemed to have gained a simple, straightforward form. In reality, however, the various difficulties now being encountered are revealing the forces which make it an extremely complex and arduous process.

II

Issues and the solutions to them, programmes and tactics, do not spring from abstract principles, but are only determined by experience, by the real practice of life. The communists' conceptions of their goal and of how it is to be attained must be elaborated on the basis of previous revolutionary practice, as they always have been. The Russian revolution and the course which the German revolution has taken up to this point represent all the evidence so far available to us as to the motive forces, conditions and forms of the proletarian revolution.

The Russian revolution brought the proletariat political control in so astonishingly rapid an

upturn that it took Western European observers completely by surprise at the time, and although the reasons for it are clearly identifiable, it has come to seem more and more astonishing in view of the difficulties that we are now experiencing in Western Europe. Its initial effect was inevitably that in the first flush of enthusiasm, the difficulties facing the revolution in Western Europe were underestimated. Before the eyes of the world proletariat, the Russian revolution unveiled the principles of the new order in all the radiance and purity of their power – the dictatorship of the proletariat, the soviet system as a new mode of democracy, the reorganisation of industry, agriculture and education. In many respects, it gave a picture of the nature and content of the proletarian revolution so simple, clear and comprehensive, so idyllic one might almost say, that nothing could seem easier than to follow this example. However, the German revolution has shown that this was not so simple, and the forces which came to the fore in Germany are by and large at work throughout the rest of Europe.

When German imperialism collapsed in November 1918, the working class was completely unprepared for the seizure of power. Shattered in mind and spirit by the four years of war and still caught up in social-democratic traditions, it was unable to achieve clear recognition of its task within the first few weeks, when governmental authority had lapsed; the intensive but brief period of communist propaganda could not compensate for this lack. The German bourgeoisie had learnt more from the Russian example than the proletariat; decking itself out in red in order to lull the workers' vigilance, it immediately began to rebuild the organs of its power. The workers' councils voluntarily surrendered their power to the leaders of the Social-Democratic Party and the democratic parliament. The workers still bearing arms as soldiers disarmed not the bourgeoisie, but themselves; the most active workers' groups were crushed by newly formed white guards, and the bourgeoisie was formed into armed civil militias. With the connivance of the trade-union leaderships, the now defenceless workers were little by little robbed of all the improvements in working conditions won in the course of the revolution. The way to communism was thus blocked with barbed-wire entanglements to secure the survival of capitalism, to enable it to sink ever deeper into chaos, that is.

These experiences gained in the course of the German revolution cannot, of course, be automatically applied to the other countries of Western Europe; the development of the revolution will follow still other courses there. Power will not suddenly fall into the hands of the unprepared masses as a result of politico-military collapse; the proletariat will have to fight hard for it, and will thus have attained a higher degree of maturity when it is won. What happened at fever-pace in Germany after the November revolution is already taking place more quietly in other countries: the bourgeoisie is drawing the consequences of the Russian revolution, making military preparations for civil war and at the same time organising the political deception of the proletariat by means of social democracy. But in spite of these differences, the German revolution shows certain general characteristics and offers certain lessons of general significance. It has made it apparent that the revolution in Western Europe *will* be a slow, arduous process and revealed *what forces are responsible for this*. The slow tempo of revolutionary development in Western Europe, although only relative, has given rise to a clash of conflicting tactical currents. In times of rapid revolutionary development, tactical differences are quickly overcome in action, or else do not become conscious; intensive principled agitation clarifies people's minds, and at the same time the masses flood in and political action overturns old conceptions. When a period of external stagnation sets in, however; when the masses let anything pass without protest and revolutionary slogans no longer seem able to catch the imagination; when difficulties mount up and the adversary seems to rise up more colossal with each engagement; when the Communist Party remains weak and experiences only defeats –

then perspectives diverge, new courses of action and new tactical methods are sought. There then emerge two main tendencies, which can be recognised in every country, for all the local variations. The one current seeks to revolutionise and clarify people's minds by word and deed, and to this end tries to pose the new principles in the sharpest possible contrast to the old, received conceptions. The other current attempts to draw the masses still on the sidelines into practical activity, and therefore emphasises points of agreement rather than points of difference in an attempt to avoid as far as is possible anything that might deter them. The first strives for a clear, sharp separation among the masses, the second for unity; the first current may be termed the radical tendency, the second the opportunist one. Given the current situation in Western Europe, with the revolution encountering powerful obstacles on the one hand and the Soviet Union's staunch resistance to the Entente governments' efforts to overthrow it making a powerful impression upon the masses on the other, we can expect a greater influx into the Third International of workers' groups until now undecided; and as a result, opportunism will doubtless become a powerful force in the Communist International.

Opportunism does not necessarily mean a pliant, conciliatory attitude and vocabulary, nor radicalism a more acerbic manner; on the contrary, lack of clear, principled tactics is all too often concealed in rabidly strident language; and indeed, in revolutionary situations, it is characteristic of opportunism to suddenly set all its hopes on the great revolutionary deed. Its essence lies in always considering the immediate questions, not what lies in the future, and to fix on the superficial aspects of phenomena rather than seeing the determinant deeper bases. When the forces are not immediately adequate for the attainment of a certain goal, it tends to make for that goal by another way, by roundabout means, rather than strengthen those forces. For its goal is immediate success, and to that it sacrifices the conditions for lasting success in the future. It seeks justification in the fact that by forming alliances with other "progressive" groups and by making concessions to outdated conceptions, it is often possible to gain power or at least split the enemy, the coalition of capitalist classes, and thus bring about conditions more favourable for the struggle. But power in such cases always turns out to be an illusion, personal power exercised by individual leaders and not the power of the proletarian class; this contradiction brings nothing but confusion, corruption and conflict in its wake. Conquest of governmental power not based upon a working class fully prepared to exercise its hegemony would be lost again, or else have to make so many concessions to reactionary forces that it would be inwardly spent. A split in the ranks of the class hostile to us – the much vaunted slogan of reformism – would not affect the unity of the inwardly united bourgeoisie, but would deceive, confuse and weaken the proletariat. Of course it can happen that the communist vanguard of the proletariat is obliged to take over political power before the normal conditions are met; but only what the masses thereby gain in terms of clarity, insight, solidarity and autonomy has lasting value as the foundation of further development towards communism.

The history of the Second International is full of examples of this policy of opportunism, and they are beginning to appear in the Third. It used to consist in seeking the assistance of non-socialist workers' groups or other classes to attain the goal of socialism. This led to tactics becoming corrupted, and finally to collapse. The situation of the Third International is now fundamentally different; for that period of quiet capitalist development is over when social democracy in the best sense of the word could do nothing more than prepare for a future revolutionary epoch by fighting confusion with principled policies. Capitalism is now collapsing; the world cannot wait until our propaganda has won a majority to lucid communist insight; the masses must intervene, and as rapidly as possible, if they themselves and the world are to be saved from catastrophe. What can a small party, however principled, do when what is needed are the masses? Is not opportunism, with

its efforts to gather the broadest masses quickly, dictated by necessity?

A revolution can no more be made by a big mass party or coalition of different parties than by a small radical party. It breaks out spontaneously among the masses; action instigated by a party can sometimes trigger it off (a rare occurrence), but the determining forces lie elsewhere, in the psychological factors deep in the unconscious of the masses and in the great events of world politics. The function of a revolutionary party lies in propagating clear understanding in advance, so that throughout the masses there will be elements who know what must be done and who are capable of judging the situation for themselves. And in the course of revolution the party has to raise the programme, slogans and directives which the spontaneously acting masses recognise as correct because they find that they express their own aims in their most adequate form and hence achieve greater clarity of purpose; it is thus that the party comes to lead the struggle. So long as the masses remain inactive, this may appear to be an unrewarding tactic; but clarity of principle has an implicit effect on many who at first hold back, and revolution reveals its active power of giving a definite direction to the struggle. If, on the other hand, it has been attempted to assemble a large party by watering down principles, forming alliances and making concessions, then this enables confused elements to gain influence in times of revolution without the masses being able to see through their inadequacy. Conformity to traditional perspectives is an attempt to gain power without the revolution in ideas that is the precondition of doing so; its effect is therefore to hold back the course of revolution. It is also doomed to failure, for only the most radical thinking can take a hold on the masses once they engage in revolution, while moderation only satisfies them so long as the revolution has yet to be made. A revolution simultaneously involves a profound upheaval in the masses' thinking; it creates the conditions for this, and is itself conditioned by it; leadership in the revolution thus falls to the Communist Party by virtue of the world-transforming power of its unambiguous principles.

In contrast with the strong, sharp emphasis on the new principles – soviet system and dictatorship – which distinguish communism from social democracy, opportunism in the Third International relies as far as possible upon the forms of struggle taken over from the Second International. After the Russian revolution had replaced parliamentary activity with the soviet system and built up the trade-union movement on the basis of the factory, the first impulse in Western Europe was to follow this example. The Communist Party of Germany boycotted the elections for the National Assembly and campaigned for immediate or gradual organisational separation from the trade unions. When the revolution slackened and stagnated in 1919, however, the Central Committee of the KPD introduced a different tactic which amounted to opting for parliamentarianism and supporting the old trade-union confederations against the industrial unions. The main argument behind this is that the Communist Party must not lose the leadership of the masses, who still think entirely in parliamentary terms, who are best reached through electoral campaigns and parliamentary speeches, and who, by entering the trade unions en masse, have increased their membership to seven million. The same thinking is to be seen in England in the attitude of the BSP: they do not want to break with the Labour Party, although it belongs to the Second International, for fear of losing contact with the mass of trade-unionists. These arguments are most sharply formulated and marshalled by our friend Karl Radek, whose *Development of the World Revolution and the Tasks of the Communist Party*, written in prison in Berlin, may be regarded as the programmatic statement of communist opportunism. Here it is argued that the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will be a long drawn-out process, in which communism should use every means of propaganda, in which parliamentary activity and the trade-union movement will remain the principal weapons of the proletariat, with the gradual introduction of workers' control as a new objective.

An examination of the foundations, conditions and difficulties of the proletarian revolution in Western Europe will show how far this is correct.

III

It has repeatedly been emphasised that the revolution will take a long time in Western Europe because the bourgeoisie is so much more powerful here than in Russia. Let us analyse the basis of this power. Does it lie in their numbers? The proletarian masses are much more numerous. Does it lie in the bourgeoisie's mastery over the whole of economic life? This certainly used to be an important power-factor; but their hegemony is fading, and in Central Europe the economy is completely bankrupt. Does it lie in their control of the state, with all its means of coercion? Certainly, it has always used the latter to hold the proletariat down, which is why the conquest of state power was the proletariat's first objective. But in November 1918, state power slipped from the nerveless grasp of the bourgeoisie in Germany and Austria, the coercive apparatus of the state was completely paralysed, the masses were in control; and the bourgeoisie was nevertheless able to build this state power up again and once more subjugate the workers. This proves that the bourgeoisie possessed another hidden source of power which had remained intact and which permitted it to re-establish its hegemony when everything seemed shattered. This hidden power is the bourgeoisie's ideological hold over the proletariat. Because the proletarian masses were still completely governed by a bourgeois mentality, they restored the hegemony of the bourgeoisie with their own hands after it had collapsed.

The German experience brings us face to face with the major problem of the revolution in Western Europe. In these countries, the old bourgeois mode of production and the centuries-old civilisation which has developed with it have completely impressed themselves upon the thoughts and feelings of the popular masses. Hence, the mentality and inner character of the masses here is quite different from that in the countries of the East, who have not experienced the rule of bourgeois culture; and this is what distinguishes the different courses that the revolution has taken in the East and the West. In England, France, Holland, Italy, Germany and Scandinavia, there has been a powerful burgher class based on petty-bourgeois and primitive capitalist production since the Middle Ages; as feudalism declined, there also grew up in the countryside an equally powerful independent peasant class, in which the individual was also master in his own small business. Bourgeois sensibilities developed into a solid national culture on this foundation, particularly in the maritime countries of England and France, which took the lead in capitalist development. In the nineteenth century, the subjection of the whole economy to capital and the inclusion of the most outlying farms into the capitalist world-trade system enhanced and refined this national culture, and the psychological propaganda of press, school and church drummed it firmly into the heads of the masses, both those whom capital proletarianised and attracted into the cities and those it left on the land. This is true not only of the homelands of capitalism, but also, albeit in different forms, of America and Australia, where Europeans founded new states, and of the countries of Central Europe, Germany, Austria, Italy, which had until then stagnated, but where the new surge of capitalist development was able to connect with an old, backward, small-peasant economy and a petty-bourgeois culture. But when capitalism pressed into the countries of Eastern Europe, it encountered very different material conditions and traditions. Here, in Russia, Poland, Hungary, even in Germany east of the Elbe, there was no strong bourgeois class which had long dominated the life of the spirit; the latter was determined by primitive agricultural conditions, with large-scale landed property, patriarchal feudalism and village communism. Here, therefore, the masses related

to communism in a more primitive, simple, open way, as receptive as blank paper. Western European social democrats often expressed derisive astonishment that the “ignorant” Russians could claim to be the vanguard of the new world of labour. Referring to these social democrats, an English delegate at the communist conference in Amsterdam pointed up the difference quite correctly: the Russians may be more ignorant, but the English workers are stuffed so full of prejudices that it is harder to propagate communism among them. These “prejudices” are only the superficial, external aspect of the bourgeois mentality which saturates the majority of the proletariat of England, Western Europe and America.

The entire content of this mentality is so many-sided and complex in its opposition to the proletarian, communist worldview that it can scarcely be summarised in a few sentences. Its primary characteristic is individualism, which has its origins in earlier petty-bourgeois and peasant forms of labour and only gradually gives way to the new proletarian sense of community and of the necessity of accepting discipline – this characteristic is probably most pronounced in the bourgeoisie and proletariat of the Anglo-Saxon countries. The individual’s perspective is limited to his work-place, instead of embracing society as a whole; so absolute does the principle of the division of labour seem, that politics itself, the government of the whole of society, is seen not as everybody’s business, but as the monopoly of a ruling stratum, the specialised province of particular experts, the politicians. With its centuries of material and intellectual commerce, its literature and art, bourgeois culture has embedded itself in the proletarian masses, and generates a feeling of national solidarity, anchored deeper in the unconscious than external indifference or superficial internationalism suggest; this can potentially express itself in national class solidarity, and greatly hinders international action.

Bourgeois culture exists in the proletariat primarily as a traditional cast of thought. The masses caught up in it think in ideological instead of real terms: bourgeois thought has always been ideological. But this ideology and tradition are not integrated; the mental reflexes left over from the innumerable class struggles of former centuries have survived as political and religious systems of thought which separate the old bourgeois world, and hence the proletarians born of it, into groups, churches, sects, parties, divided according to their ideological perspectives. The bourgeois past thus also survives in the proletariat as an organisational tradition that stands in the way of the class unity necessary for the creation of the new world; in these archaic organisations the workers make up the followers and adherents of a bourgeois vanguard. It is the intelligentsia which supplies the leaders in these ideological struggles. The intelligentsia – priests, teachers, literati, journalists, artists, politicians – form a numerous class, the function of which is to foster, develop and propagate bourgeois culture; it passes this on to the masses, and acts as mediator between the hegemony of capital and the interests of the masses. The hegemony of capital is rooted in this group’s intellectual leadership of the masses. For even though the oppressed masses have often rebelled against capital and its agencies, they have only done so under the leadership of the intelligentsia; and the firm solidarity and discipline won in this common struggle subsequently proves to be the strongest support of the system once these leaders openly go over to the side of capitalism. Thus, the Christian ideology of the declining petty bourgeois strata, which had become a living force as an expression of their struggle against the modern capitalist state, often proved its worth subsequently as a reactionary system that bolstered up the state, as with Catholicism in Germany after the *Kulturkampf*. Despite the value of its theoretical contribution, much the same is true of the role played by social democracy in destroying and extinguishing old ideologies in the rising work-force, as history demanded it should do: it made the proletarian masses mentally dependent upon political and other leaders, who, as specialists, the masses left to manage all the important matters of a general nature affecting the class, instead of themselves taking them in hand. The firm solidarity and discipline which developed

in the often acute class struggles of half a century did not bury capitalism, for it represented the power of leadership and organisation over the masses; and in August 1914 and November 1918 these made the masses helpless tools of the bourgeoisie, of imperialism and of reaction. The ideological power of the bourgeois past over the proletariat means that in many of the countries of Western Europe, in Germany and Holland, for example, it is divided into ideologically opposed groups which stand in the way of class unity. Social democracy originally sought to realise this class unity, but partly due to its opportunist tactics, which substituted purely political policies for class politics, it was unsuccessful in this: it merely increased the number of groups by one.

In times of crisis when the masses are driven to desperation and to action, the hegemony of bourgeois ideology over the masses cannot prevent the power of this tradition temporarily flagging, as in Germany in November 1918. But then the ideology comes to the fore again, and turns temporary victory into defeat. The concrete forces which in our view make up the hegemony of bourgeois conceptions can be seen at work in the case of Germany: in reverence for abstract slogans like “democracy”; in the power of old habits of thought and programme-points, such as the realisation of socialism through parliamentary leaders and a socialist government; in the lack of proletarian self-confidence evidenced by the effect upon the masses of the barrage of filthy lies published about Russia; in the masses’ lack of faith in their own power; but above all, in their trust in the party, in the organisation and in the leaders who for decades had incarnated their struggle, their revolutionary goals, their idealism. The tremendous mental, moral and material power of the organisations, these enormous machines painstakingly created by the masses themselves with years of effort, which incarnated the tradition of the forms of struggle belonging to a period in which the labour movement was a limb of ascendant capital, now crushed all the revolutionary tendencies once more flaring up in the masses.

This example will not remain unique. The contradiction between the rapid economic collapse of capitalism and the immaturity of spirit represented by the power of bourgeois tradition over the proletariat – a contradiction which has not come about by accident, in that the proletariat cannot achieve the maturity of spirit required for hegemony and freedom within a flourishing capitalism – can only be resolved by the process of revolutionary development, in which spontaneous uprisings and seizures of power alternate with setbacks. It makes it very improbable that the revolution will take a course in which the proletariat for a long time storms the fortress of capital in vain, using both the old and new means of struggle, until it eventually conquers it once and for all; and the tactics of a long drawn-out and carefully engineered siege posed in Radek’s schema thus fall through. The tactical problem is not how to win power as quickly as possible if such power will be merely illusory – this is only too easy an option for the communists – but how the basis of lasting class power is to be developed in the proletariat. No “resolute minority” can resolve the problems which can only be resolved by the action of the class as a whole; and if the populace allows such a seizure of power to take place over its head with apparent indifference, it is not, for all that, a genuinely passive mass, but is capable, in so far as it has not been won over to communism, of rounding upon the revolution at any moment as the active follower of reaction. And a “coalition with the gallows on hand” would do no more than disguise an untenable party dictatorship of this kind. When a tremendous uprising of the proletariat destroys the bankrupt rule of the bourgeoisie, and the Communist Party, the clearest vanguard of the proletariat, takes over political control, it has only one task – to eradicate the sources of weakness in the proletariat by all possible means and to strengthen it so that it will be fully equal to the revolutionary struggles that the future holds in store. This means raising the masses themselves to the highest pitch of activity, whipping up their initiative, increasing their self-confidence, so that they themselves will be able to recognise the tasks

thrust upon them, for it is only thus that the latter can be successfully carried out. This makes it necessary to break the domination of traditional organisational forms and of the old leaders, and in no circumstances to join them in a coalition government; to develop the new forms, to consolidate the material power of the masses; only in this way will it be possible to reorganise both production and defence against the external assaults of capitalism, and this is the precondition of preventing counter-revolution.

Such power as the bourgeoisie still possesses in this period resides in the proletariat's lack of autonomy and independence of spirit. The process of revolutionary development consists in the proletariat emancipating itself from this dependence, from the traditions of the past – and this is only possible through its own experience of struggle. Where capitalism is already an institution of long standing and the workers have thus already been struggling against it for several generations, the proletariat has in every period had to build up methods, forms and aids to struggle corresponding to the contemporary stage of capitalist development, and these have soon ceased to be seen as the temporary expedients that they are, and instead idolised as lasting, absolute, perfect forms; they have thus subsequently become fetters upon development which had to be broken. Whereas the class is caught up in constant upheaval and rapid development, the leaders remain at a particular stage, as the spokesmen of a particular phase, and their tremendous influence can hold back the movement; forms of action become dogmas, and organisations are raised to the status of ends in themselves, making it all the more difficult to reorientate and readapt to the changed conditions of struggle. This still applies; every stage of the development of the class struggle must overcome the traditions of previous stages if it is to be capable of recognising its own tasks clearly and carrying them out effectively – except that development is now proceeding at a far faster pace. The revolution thus develops through the process of internal struggle. It is within the proletariat itself that the resistances develop which it must overcome; and in overcoming them, the proletariat overcomes its own limitations and matures towards communism.

IV

Parliamentary activity and the trade-union movement were the two principal forms of struggle in the time of the Second International.

The congresses of the first International Working-Men's Association laid the basis of this tactic by taking issue with primitive conceptions belonging to the pre-capitalist, petty-bourgeois period and, in accordance with Marx's social theory, defining the character of the proletarian class struggle as a continuous struggle by the proletariat against capitalism for the means of subsistence, a struggle which would lead to the conquest of political power. When the period of bourgeois revolutions and armed uprisings had come to a close, this political struggle could only be carried on within the framework of the old or newly created national states, and trade-union struggle was often subject to even tighter restrictions. The First International was therefore bound to break up; and the struggle for the new tactics, which it was itself unable to practise, burst it apart; meanwhile, the tradition of the old conceptions and methods of struggle remained alive amongst the anarchists. The new tactics were bequeathed by the International to those who would have to put them into practice, the trade unions and Social-Democratic Parties which were springing up on every hand. When the Second International arose as a loose federation of the latter, it did in fact still have to combat tradition in the form of anarchism; but the legacy of the First International already formed its undisputed tactical base. Today, every communist knows why these methods of struggle were necessary and productive at that time: when the working class is developing within ascendant

capitalism, it is not yet capable of creating organs which would enable it to control and order society, nor can it even conceive the necessity of doing so. It must first orientate itself mentally and learn to understand capitalism and its class rule. The vanguard of the proletariat, the Social-Democratic Party, must reveal the nature of the system through its propaganda and show the masses their goals by raising class demands. It was therefore necessary for its spokesmen to enter the parliaments, the centres of bourgeois rule, in order to raise their voices on the tribunes and take part in conflicts between the political parties.

Matters change when the struggle of the proletariat enters a revolutionary phase. We are not here concerned with the question of why the parliamentary system is inadequate as a system of government for the masses and why it must give way to the soviet system, but with the utilisation of parliament as a means of struggle by the proletariat. As such, parliamentary activity is the paradigm of struggles in which only the leaders are actively involved and in which the masses themselves play a subordinate role. It consists in individual deputies carrying on the main battle; this is bound to arouse the illusion among the masses that others can do their fighting for them. People used to believe that leaders could obtain important reforms for the workers in parliament; and the illusion even arose that parliamentarians could carry out the transformation to socialism by acts of parliament. Now that parliamentarianism has grown more modest in its claims, one hears the argument that deputies in parliament could make an important contribution to communist propaganda. But this always means that the main emphasis falls on the leaders, and it is taken for granted that specialists will determine policy – even if this is done under the democratic veil of debates and resolutions by congresses; the history of social democracy is a series of unsuccessful attempts to induce the members themselves to determine policy. This is all inevitable while the proletariat is carrying on a parliamentary struggle, while the masses have yet to create organs of self-action, while the revolution has still to be made, that is; and as soon as the masses start to intervene, act and take decisions on their own behalf, the disadvantages of parliamentary struggle become overwhelming.

As we argued above, the tactical problem is how we are to eradicate the traditional bourgeois mentality which paralyses the strength of the proletarian masses; everything which lends new power to the received conceptions is harmful. The most tenacious and intractable element in this mentality is dependence upon leaders, whom the masses leave to determine general questions and to manage their class affairs. *Parliamentarianism inevitably tends to inhibit the autonomous activity by the masses that is necessary for revolution.* Fine speeches may be made in parliament exhorting the proletariat to revolutionary action; it is not in such words that the latter has its origins, however, but in the hard necessity of there being no other alternative.

Revolution also demands something more than the massive assault that topples a government and which, as we know, cannot be summoned up by leaders, but can only spring from the profound impulse of the masses. Revolution requires social reconstruction to be undertaken, difficult decisions made, the whole proletariat involved in creative action – and this is only possible if first the vanguard, then a greater and greater number take matters in hand themselves, know their own responsibilities, investigate, agitate, wrestle, strive, reflect, assess, seize chances and act upon them. But all this is difficult and laborious; thus, so long as the working class thinks it sees an easier way out through others acting on its behalf leading agitation from a high platform, taking decisions, giving signals for action, making laws – the old habits of thought and the old weaknesses will make it hesitate and remain passive.

While on the one hand parliamentarianism has the counterrevolutionary effect of strengthening the leaders' dominance over the masses, on the other it has a tendency to corrupt these leaders

themselves. When personal statesmanship has to compensate for what is lacking in the active power of the masses, petty diplomacy develops; whatever intentions the party may have started out with, it has to try and gain a legal base, a position of parliamentary power; and so finally the relationship between means and ends is reversed, and it is no longer parliament that serves as a means towards communism, but communism that stands as an advertising slogan for parliamentary politics. In the process, however, the communist party itself takes on a different character. Instead of a vanguard grouping the entire class behind it for the purpose of revolutionary action, it becomes a parliamentary party with the same legal status as the others, joining in their quarrels, a new edition of the old social democracy under new radical slogans. Whereas there can be no essential antagonism, no internal conflict between the revolutionary working class and the communist party, since the party incarnates a form of synthesis between the proletariat's most lucid class-consciousness and its growing unity, parliamentary activity shatters this unity and creates the possibility of such a conflict: instead of unifying the class, communism becomes a new party with its own party chiefs, a party which falls in with the others and thus perpetuates the political division of the class. All these tendencies will doubtless be cut short once again by the development of the economy in a revolutionary sense; but even the first beginnings of this process can only harm the revolutionary movement by inhibiting the development of lucid class-consciousness; and when the economic situation temporarily favours counter-revolution, this policy will pave the way for a diversion of the revolution on to the terrain of reaction.

What is great and truly communist about the Russian revolution is above all the fact that it has awoken the masses' own activity and ignited the spiritual and physical energy in them to build and sustain a new society. Rousing the masses to this consciousness of their own power is something which cannot be achieved all at once, but only in stages; one stage on this way to independence is the rejection of parliamentarianism. When, in December 1918, the newly formed Communist Party of Germany resolved to boycott the National Assembly, this decision did not proceed from any immature illusion of quick, easy victory, but from the proletariat's need to emancipate itself from its psychological dependence upon parliamentary representatives – a necessary reaction against the tradition of social democracy – because the way to self-activity could now be seen to lie in building up the council system. However, one half of those united at that time, those who have stayed in the KPD, readopted parliamentarianism with the ebb of the revolution: with what consequences it remains to be seen, but which have in part been demonstrated already. In other countries too, opinion is divided among the communists, and many groups want to refrain from parliamentary activity even before the outbreak of revolution. The international dispute over the use of parliament as a method of struggle will thus clearly be one of the main tactical issues within the Third International over the next few years.

At any rate, everyone is agreed that parliamentary activity only forms a subsidiary feature of our tactics. The Second International was able to develop up to the point where it had brought out and laid bare the essence of the new tactics: that the proletariat can only conquer imperialism with the weapons of mass action. The Second International itself was no longer able to employ these; it was bound to collapse when the world war put the revolutionary class struggle on to an international plane. The legacy of the earlier internationals was the natural foundation of the new international: mass action by the proletariat to the point of general strike and civil war forms the common tactical platform of the communists. In parliamentary activity the proletariat is divided into nations, and a genuinely international intervention is not possible; in mass action against international capital national divisions fall away, and every movement, to whatever countries it extends or is limited, is part of a single world struggle.

6.2 Vladimir Lenin, Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder (1920)

In What Sense we can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution

In the first months after the proletariat in Russia had won political power (October 25 [November 7], 1917), it might have seemed that the enormous difference between backward Russia and the advanced countries of Western Europe would lead to the proletarian revolution in the latter countries bearing very little resemblance to ours. We now possess quite considerable international experience, which shows very definitely that certain fundamental features of our revolution have a significance that is not local, or peculiarly national, or Russian alone, but international. I am not speaking here of international significance in the broad sense of the term: not merely several but all the primary features of our revolution, and many of its secondary features, are of international significance in the meaning of its effect: on all countries. I am speaking of it in the narrowest sense of the word, taking international significance to mean the international validity or the historical inevitability of a repetition, on an international scale, of what has taken place in our country. It must be admitted that certain fundamental features of our revolution do possess that significance.

It would, of course, be grossly erroneous to exaggerate this truth and to extend it beyond certain fundamental features of our revolution. It would also be erroneous to lose sight of the fact that, soon after the victory of the proletarian revolution in at least one of the advanced countries, a sharp change will probably come about: Russia will cease to be the model and will once again become a backward country (in the “Soviet” and the socialist sense).

At the present moment in history, however, it is the Russian model that reveals to *all* countries something – and something highly significant – of their near and inevitable future. Advanced workers in all lands have long realised this; more often than not, they have grasped it with their revolutionary class instinct rather than realised it. Herein lies the international “significance” (in the narrow sense of the word) of Soviet power, and of the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics. The “revolutionary” leaders of the Second International, such as Kautsky in Germany and Otto Bauer and Friedrich Adler in Austria, have failed to understand this, which is why they have proved to be reactionaries and advocates of the worst kind of opportunism and social treachery. Incidentally, the anonymous pamphlet entitled *The World Revolution (Weltrevolution)*, which appeared in Vienna in 1919 (*Sozialistische Bucherei*, Heft 11; Ignaz Brand), very clearly reveals their entire thinking and their entire range of ideas, or, rather, the full extent of their stupidity, pedantry, baseness and betrayal of working-class interests – and that, moreover, under the guise of “defending” the idea of “world revolution”.

...

“Left-Wing” Communism in Germany The Leaders, the Party, the Class, the Masses

The German Communists we must now speak of call themselves, not “Left-wingers” but, if I am not mistaken, an “opposition on principle”. From what follows below it will, however, be seen that they reveal all the symptoms of the “infantile disorder of Leftism”.

Published by the “local group in Frankfurt am Main”, a pamphlet reflecting the point of view of this opposition, and entitled *The Split in the Communist Party of Germany (The Spartacus League)* sets forth the substance of this Opposition’s views most saliently, and with the utmost clarity and concision. A few quotations will suffice to acquaint the reader with that substance:

“The Communist Party is the party of the most determined class struggle...”

“... Politically, the transitional period [between capitalism and socialism] is one of the proletarian dictatorship...”

“... The question arises: who is to exercise this dictatorship: *the Communist Party or the proletarian class?* ... *Fundamentally*, should we strive for a dictatorship of the Communist Party, or for a dictatorship of the proletarian class?...”

(All italics as in the original)

The author of the pamphlet goes on to accuse the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Germany of seeking ways of achieving a *coalition with the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany*, and of raising “*the question of recognising, in principle, all political means*” of struggle, including parliamentarianism, with the sole purpose of concealing its actual and main efforts to form a coalition with the Independents. The pamphlet goes on to say:

“The opposition have chosen another road. They are of the opinion that the question of the rule of the Communist Party and of the dictatorship of the Party is merely one of tactics. In any case, rule by the Communist Party is the ultimate form of any party rule. *Fundamentally*, we must work for the dictatorship of the proletarian class. And all the measures of the Party, its organisations, methods of struggle, strategy and tactics should be directed to that end. Accordingly, all compromise with other parties, all reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle which have become historically and politically obsolete, and any policy of manoeuvring and compromise must be emphatically rejected.” “Specifically proletarian methods of revolutionary struggle must be strongly emphasised. New forms of organisation must be created on the widest basis and with the widest scope in order to enlist the most extensive proletarian circles and strata to take part in the revolutionary struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party. A *Workers’ Union*, based on factory organisations, should be the rallying point for all revolutionary elements. This should unite all workers who follow the slogan: “Get out of the trade unions!” It is here that the militant proletariat musters its ranks for battle. Recognition of the class struggle, of the Soviet system and of the dictatorship should be sufficient for enrolment. All subsequent political education of the fighting masses and their political orientation in the struggle are the task of the Communist Party, which stands outside the Workers’ Union....

“... Consequently, two Communist parties are now arrayed against each other:

“*One is a party of leaders*, which is out to organise the revolutionary struggle and to direct it from *above*, accepting compromises and parliamentarianism so as to create a situation enabling it to join a coalition government exercising a dictatorship.

“*The other is a mass party*, which expects an upsurge of the revolutionary struggle from *below*, which knows and applies a single method in this struggle – a method which clearly leads to the goal – and rejects all parliamentary and opportunist methods. That single method is the unconditional *overthrow of the bourgeoisie*, so as then to set up the proletarian class dictatorship for the accomplishment of socialism...”

“... There – the dictatorship of leaders; here – the dictatorship of the masses! That is our slogan.”

Such are the main features characterising the views of the opposition in the German Communist Party.

Any Bolshevik who has consciously participated in the development of Bolshevism since 1903 or has closely observed that development will at once say, after reading these arguments, “What old and familiar rubbish! What ‘Left-wing’ childishness!”

But let us examine these arguments a little more closely.

The mere presentation of the question – “dictatorship of the party *or* dictatorship of the class; dictatorship (party) of the leaders, *or* dictatorship (party) of the masses?” – testifies to most incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking. These people want to *invent* something quite out of the ordinary, and, in their effort to be clever, make themselves ridiculous. It is common knowledge that the masses are divided into classes, that the masses can be contrasted with classes only by contrasting the vast majority in general, regardless of division according to status in the social system of production, with categories holding a definite status in the social system of production; that as a rule and in most cases – at least in present-day civilised countries – classes are led by political parties; that political parties, as a general rule, are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential and experienced members, who are elected to the most responsible positions, and are called leaders. All this is elementary. All this is clear and simple. Why replace this with some kind of rigmarole, some new Volapük? On the one hand, these people seem to have got muddled when they found themselves in a predicament, when the party’s abrupt transition from legality to illegality upset the customary, normal and simple relations between leaders, parties and classes. In Germany, as in other European countries, people had become too accustomed to legality, to the free and proper election of “leaders” at regular party congresses, to the convenient method of testing the class composition of parties through parliamentary elections, mass meetings the press, the sentiments of the trade unions and other associations, etc. When, instead of this customary procedure, it became necessary, because of the stormy development of the revolution and the development of the civil war, to go over rapidly from legality to illegality, to combine the two, and to adopt the “inconvenient” and “undemocratic” methods of selecting, or forming, or preserving “groups of leaders” – people lost their bearings and began to think up some unmitigated nonsense. Certain members of the Communist Party of Holland, who were unlucky enough to be born in a small country with traditions and conditions of highly privileged and highly stable legality, and who had never seen a transition from legality to illegality, probably fell into confusion, lost their heads, and helped create these absurd inventions.

On the other hand, one can see simply a thoughtless and incoherent use of the now “fashionable” terms: “masses” and “leaders”. These people have heard and memorised a great many attacks on “leaders”, in which the latter have been contrasted with the “masses”; however, they have proved unable to think matters out and gain a clear understanding of what it was all about.

The divergence between “leaders” and “masses” was brought out with particular clarity and sharpness in all countries at the end of the imperialist war and following it. The principal reason for this was explained many times by Marx and Engels between the years 1852 and 1892, from the example of Britain. That country’s exclusive position led to the emergence, from the “masses”, of a semi-petty-bourgeois, opportunist “labour aristocracy”. The leaders of this labour aristocracy were constantly going over to the bourgeoisie, and were directly or indirectly on its pay roll. Marx earned the honour of incurring the hatred of these disreputable persons by openly branding them as traitors. Present-day (twentieth-century) imperialism has given a few advanced countries an exceptionally privileged position, which, everywhere in the Second International, has produced a certain type of traitor, opportunist, and social-chauvinist leaders, who champion the interests of their own craft,

their own section of the labour aristocracy. The opportunist parties have become separated from the “masses”, i.e., from the broadest strata of the working people, their majority, the lowest-paid workers. The revolutionary proletariat cannot be victorious unless this evil is combated, unless the opportunist, social-traitor leaders are exposed, discredited and expelled. That is the policy the Third International has embarked on.

To go so far, in this connection, as to contrast, *in general*, the dictatorship of the masses with a dictatorship of the leaders is ridiculously absurd, and stupid. What is particularly amusing is that, in fact, instead of the old leaders, who hold generally accepted views on simple matters, *new leaders* are brought forth (under cover of the slogan “Down with the leaders!”), who talk rank stuff and nonsense. Such are Laufenberg, Wolffheim, Horner, Karl Schroder, Friedrich Wendel and Karl Erler, in Germany. Erler’s attempts to give the question more “profundity” and to proclaim that in general political parties are unnecessary and “bourgeois” are so supremely absurd that one can only shrug one’s shoulders. It all goes to drive home the truth that a minor error can always assume monstrous proportions if it is persisted in, if profound justifications are sought for it, and if it is carried to its logical conclusion.

Repudiation of the Party principle and of Party discipline – that is what the opposition has *arrived at*. And this is tantamount to completely disarming the proletariat in *the interests of the bourgeoisie*. It all adds up to that petty-bourgeois diffuseness and instability, that incapacity for sustained effort, unity and organised action, which, if encouraged, must inevitably destroy any proletarian revolutionary movement. From the standpoint of communism, repudiation of the Party principle means attempting to leap from the eve of capitalism’s collapse (in Germany), not to the lower or the intermediate phase of communism, but to the higher. We in Russia (in the third year since the overthrow of the bourgeoisie) are making the first steps in the transition from capitalism to socialism or the lower stage of communism. Classes still remain, and will remain everywhere *for years after* the proletariat’s conquest of power. Perhaps in Britain, where there is no peasantry (but where petty proprietors exist), this period may be shorter. The abolition of classes means, not merely ousting the landowners and the capitalists – that is something we accomplished with comparative ease; it also means *abolishing the small commodity producers*, and they *cannot be ousted*, or crushed; we *must learn to live* with them. They can (and must) be transformed and re-educated only by means of very prolonged, slow, and cautious organisational work. They surround the proletariat on every side with a petty-bourgeois atmosphere, which permeates and corrupts the proletariat, and constantly causes among the proletariat relapses into petty-bourgeois spinelessness, disunity, individualism, and alternating moods of exaltation and dejection. The strictest centralisation and discipline are required within the political party of the proletariat in order to counteract this, in order that the *organisational* role of the proletariat (and that is its *principal* role) may be exercised correctly, successfully and victoriously. The dictatorship of the proletariat means a persistent struggle – bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative – against the forces and traditions of the old society. The force of habit in millions and tens of millions is a most formidable force. Without a party of iron that has been tempered in the struggle, a party enjoying the confidence of all honest people in the class in question, a party capable of watching and influencing the mood of the masses, such a struggle cannot be waged successfully. It is a thousand times easier to vanquish the centralised big bourgeoisie than to “vanquish” the millions upon millions of petty proprietors; however, through their ordinary, everyday, imperceptible, elusive and demoralising activities, they produce the *very* results which the bourgeoisie need and which tend to *restore* the bourgeoisie. Whoever brings about even the slightest weakening of the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during its dictatorship), is actually aiding

the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

Parallel with the question of the leaders – the party – the class – the masses, we must pose the question of the “reactionary” trade unions. But first I shall take the liberty of making a few concluding remarks based on the experience of our Party. There *have always been* attacks on the “dictatorship of leaders” in our Party. The first time I heard such attacks, I recall, was in 1895, when, officially, no party yet existed, but a central group was taking shape in St. Petersburg, which was to assume the leadership of the district groups. At the Ninth Congress of our Party (April 1920), there was a small opposition, which also spoke against the “dictatorship of leaders”, against the “oligarchy”, and so on. There is therefore nothing surprising, new, or terrible in the “infantile disorder” of “Left-wing communism” among the Germans. The ailment involves no danger, and after it the organism even becomes more robust. In our case, on the other hand, the rapid alternation of legal and illegal work, which made it necessary to keep the general staff – the leaders – under cover and cloak them in the greatest secrecy, sometimes gave rise to extremely dangerous consequences. The worst of these was that in 1912 the *agent provocateur* Malinovsky got into the Bolshevik Central Committee. He betrayed scores and scores of the best and most loyal comrades, caused them to be sentenced to penal servitude, and hastened the death of many of them. That he did not cause still greater harm was due to the correct balance between legal and illegal work. As member of the Party’s Central Committee and Duma deputy, Malinovsky was forced, in order to gain our confidence, to help us establish legal daily papers, which even under tsarism were able to wage a struggle against the Menshevik opportunism and to spread the fundamentals of Bolshevism in a suitably disguised form. While, with one hand, Malinovsky sent scores and scores of the finest Bolsheviks to penal servitude and death, he was obliged, with the other, to assist in the education of scores and scores of thousands of new Bolsheviks through the medium of the legal press. Those German (and also British, American, French and Italian) comrades who are faced with the task of learning how to conduct revolutionary work within the reactionary trade unions would do well to give serious thought to this fact.

In many countries, including the most advanced, the bourgeoisie are undoubtedly sending *agents provocateurs* into the Communist parties and will continue to do so. A skilful combining of illegal and legal work is one of the ways to combat this danger.

6.3 Herman Gorter, Open Letter to Comrade Lenin (1920)

Introduction

Dear Comrade Lenin,

I have read your brochure on the Radicalism in the Communist movement. It has taught me a great deal, as all your writings have done. For this I feel grateful to you, and doubtless many other comrades feel as I do. Many a trace, and many a germ of this infantile disease, to which without a doubt, I also am a victim, has been chased away by your brochure, or will yet be eradicated by it. Your observations about the confusion that revolution has caused in many brains, is quite right too. I know that. The revolution came so suddenly, and in a way so utterly different from what we expected. Your words will be an incentive to me, once again, and to an even greater extent than before, to base my judgement in all matters of tactics, also in the revolution, exclusively on reality, on the actual class-relations, as they manifest themselves politically and economically.

After having read your brochure I thought all this is right.

But after having considered for a long time whether I would cease to uphold this “Left Wing,” and to write articles for the KAPD and the Opposition party in England, I had to decline.

Basis Mistaken.

This seems contradictory. It is due, though, to the fact that the starting-point in the brochure is not right. To my idea you are mistaken in your judgement regarding the analogy of the West-European revolution with the Russian one, regarding the conditions of the West-European revolution, that is to say the class-relations, and this leads you to mistake the cause, from which this Left Wing, the opposition, originates.

Therefore the brochure SEEMS to be right, as long as your starting-point is assumed. If, however (as it should be), your starting point is rejected, the entire brochure is wrong. As all your mistaken, and partly mistaken, judgements converge in your condemnation of the Left movement, especially in Germany and England, and as I firmly intend to defend those of the Left Wing, although, as the leaders know, I do not agree with them on all points, I imagine I had best answer your brochure by a defence of the Left Wing. This will enable me not only to point out its origin (the cause from which it springs), and to prove its right, and merits, in the present stage, and here, in Western Europe, but also, which is of equal importance, to combat the mistaken conceptions that are prevalent in Russia with regard to the West-European Revolution.

Both these points are of importance, as it is on the conception of the West-European revolution that the West-European as well as the Russian tactics depend. I should have liked to do this at the Moscow Congress, which, however, I was not able to attend.

Two Arguments Refuted.

In the first place I must refute two of your arguments, that may mislead the judgment of comrades or readers. You scoff and sneer at the ridiculous and childish nonsense of the struggle in Germany, at the “dictatorship of the leaders or of the masses,” at “from above or below,” etc. We quite agree with you, that these should be no questions at all. But we do not agree with your scoffing. For that is the pity of it: in Western Europe they still are questions. In Western Europe we still have, in many countries, leaders of the type of the Second International; here we are still seeking the right leaders, those that *do not try to dominate the masses*, that do not betray them; and as long as we do not find these leaders, we want to do all things from below, and through the dictatorship of the masses themselves. If I have a mountain-guide, and he should lead me into the abyss, I prefer to do without him. As soon as we have found the right guides, we will stop this searching. Then mass and leader will be really one. This, and nothing else, is what the German and English Left Wing, what we ourselves, mean by these words.

And the same holds good for your second remark, that the leader should form one united whole with class and mass. We quite agree with you. But the question is to find and rear leaders that are really one with the masses. This can only be accomplished by the masses, the political parties and the Trade Unions, by means of the most severe struggle, also inwardly. And the same holds good for iron discipline, and strong centralisation. We want them all right, but not until we have the right leaders. This severest of all struggles, which is now being fought most strenuously in Germany and England, the two countries where Communism is nearest to its realisation, can only be harmed by your scoffing. Your attitude panders to the opportunist elements in the Third International. By this scoffing, you abet the opportunist elements in the Third International.

For it is one of the means by which elements in the Spartakus League and in the BSP, and also in the Communist Parties in many other countries, imposes upon the workers, when they say that the entire question of masses and leader is absurd, is “nonsense and childishness.” Through this phrase they avoid, and wish to avoid, all criticism of themselves, the leaders. It is by means of this phrase of an iron discipline and centralisation, that they crush the opposition. And this opportunism is abetted by you.

You should not do this, Comrade. We are only in the introductory stage yet, here in Western Europe. And in that stage it is better to encourage the fighters than the rulers.

I only touch on this quite perfunctorily here. In the course of this writing I will deal with this matter more at length. There is a deeper reason yet why I cannot agree with your brochure. It is the following.

Difference Between Russia and W. Europe.

On reading your pamphlets, brochures and books, nearly all of which writings filled us with admiration and approbation, we Marxists of Western Europe invariably came to a point where we suddenly grew wary, and on the look-out for a more detailed explanation; and if we failed to find this explanation, we accepted the statement but grudgingly, with all due reservations. This was your statement regarding the workers and the poor peasants. It occurs often, very often. And you always mention both these categories as revolutionary factors all the world over. And nowhere, at least as far as I have read, is there a clear and outspoken recognition of the immense difference which prevails in the matter between Russia (and a few other countries in Eastern Europe) and Western Europe (that is to say Germany, France, England, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries, and perhaps even Italy). And yet, in my opinion, the fundamental difference between your conception of the tactics concerning Trade Unionism and Parliamentarism, and that of the so-called Left Wing in Western Europe, lies mainly in this point.

Of course you know this difference as well as I do, only you failed to draw from it the conclusions for the tactics in Western Europe, at least as far as I am able to judge from your works. These conclusions you have not taken into consideration, and consequently your judgement on these West-European tactics is false.

And this is all the more dangerous, because this phrase of yours is parroted automatically in all the Communist Parties of Western Europe, even by Marxists. To judge from all Communist papers, magazines and brochures, and from all public assemblies, one might even surmise that a revolt of the poor peasants in Western Europe might break out at any moment! Nowhere is the great difference with Russia pointed out, and thus the judgment, also of the proletariat, is led astray. Because in Russia you were able to triumph with the help of a large class of poor peasants, you represent things in such a way, as if we in Western Europe are also going to have that help. Because you, in Russia, have triumphed exclusively through this help, you wish to make us believe that here also we will triumph through this help. You do this by means of your silence with regard to this question, as it stands in Western Europe, and your entire tactics are based on this representation.

Poor Peasants Decisive Factor.

This representation, however, is not the truth. There is an enormous difference between Russia and Western Europe. In general the importance of the poor peasants as a revolutionary factor decreases from east to west. In some Parts of Asia, China, and India, in the event of a revolution, this class would be the absolutely decisive factor; in Russia it constitutes an indispensable and, indeed, one

of the main factors; in Poland, and in a few states of South-Eastern and Central Europe, it is still of importance for the revolution, but further West its attitude grows ever more antagonistic towards the revolution.

Russia had an industrial proletariat of some seven or eight millions. The number of poor peasants, however, amounted to about 25 millions. (I beg you to excuse the inevitable numerical errors; I have to quote from memory, as this letter should be despatched with all speed). When Kerensky failed to give these poor peasants the soil, you knew that before long they would come to you, the minute they should become aware of the fact. This is not so in Western Europe, and will not become so either; in the countries of Western Europe, which I have named, conditions of that sort do not exist.

The poor peasant here lives under conditions quite different from those of Russia. Though often terrible, they are not as appalling as they were there. As farmers or owners, the poor peasants possess a piece of land. The excellent means of transport enables them often to sell their goods. At the very worst they can mostly provide their own food. During the last ten years things have improved somewhat for them. Now, during and since the war, they can obtain high prices. They are indispensable, the import of foodstuffs being very limited. Regularly, therefore, they will be able to get high prices. They are supported by Capitalism. Capitalism will maintain them, as long as it can maintain itself. In your country, the position of the poor peasants was far more terrible. With you, therefore, the poor peasants had a political, revolutionary programme, and were organised in a political, revolutionary party: with the social-revolutionaries. With us this is nowhere the case. Moreover, in Russia there was an enormous amount of landed property to be divided, large estates, crown lands, government land, and the estates held by the monasteries. But the Communists of Western Europe, what can they offer to the poor peasants, to win them to their side?

Nothing to Offer Peasants.

Germany counted, before the war, from four to five million poor peasants (up to two hectares). Only eight or nine millions, however, were employed in actual large-scale industries (over 100 hectares). If the Communists were to divide all of these, the poor peasants would still be poor peasants, as the seven or eight million field-labourers also claim their share. And they cannot even divide them, as they will use them as large-scale industries.

These numbers show that in Western Europe there are comparatively few poor peasants; that, therefore, the auxiliary forces, if there were any at all, would be very few in numbers.

The Communists in Germany, therefore, except in relatively insignificant regions, do not even have the means to win over the poor peasants. For the medium and small industries will surely not be expropriated. And it is practically the same in the case of the four or five million poor peasants in France, and also for Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, and two of the Scandinavian countries. Everywhere small and medium sized industry prevails. And even in Italy there is no absolute certainty; not to mention England, which counts only some one or two hundred thousand peasants.

Neither will they be attracted by the promise that under Communism they will be exempt from rent-paying and mortgage-rent. For with Communism they see the approach of civil war, the loss of markets, and general destruction.

Unless, therefore, there should come a crisis far more terrible than the present one in Germany, a crisis, indeed, far exceeding the horrors of any other crises that ever were before, the poor peasants in Western Europe will side with Capitalism, as long as it has any life left.

Industrial Workers Stand Alone.

The workers in Western Europe stand all alone. Only a very slight portion of the lower middle class will help them. And these are economically insignificant. The workers will have to make the revolution all by themselves. Here is the great difference as compared to Russia.

Possibly you will say, Comrade Lenin, that this was the case in Russia. There also the proletariat has made the revolution all by itself. It is only after the revolution that the poor peasants joined. You are right, and yet the difference is immense.

You knew with absolute certainty that the peasants would come to you, and that they would come quickly. You knew that Kerensky would not, and could not give them the land. You knew that they would not help Kerensky long. You had a magic charm, "The Land to the Peasants," by means of which you would win them in the course of a few months to the side of the proletariat. We, on the other hand, are certain that for some time to come the poor peasants, all over Western Europe, will side with Capitalism.

You will possibly say that, although in Germany there is no great mass of poor peasants whose assistance can be relied on, the millions of proletarians that side as yet with the bourgeoisie are sure to come round. That, therefore, the place of the poor peasants in Russia will here be taken by the proletarians, so that there is help all the same. This representation is also fundamentally wrong, and the immense difference remains.

The Russian peasants joined the proletariat AFTER Capitalism has been defeated; but when the German workers that are now as yet on the side of Capitalism join the ranks of the Communists, the struggle against Capitalism will begin in real earnest.

The revolution in Russia was terrible for the proletariat in the long years of its development and it is terrible now, after the victory. But at the actual time of revolution it was easy, and this was due to the peasants.

With us it is quite the contrary. In its development the revolution was easy, and it will be easy afterwards; but its actual coming will be terrible – more terrible, perhaps, than any other revolution ever was, for Capitalism, which in your country was weak and only slightly rooted as it were to feudalism, the middle ages and even barbarism, here in our country is strong and widely organised and deeply rooted, and the lower middle classes as well as the peasants, who always side with the strongest, with the exception of a shallow and economically unimportant layer, will stand with Capitalism until the very end.

The revolution in Russia was victorious with the help of the poor peasants. This should always be borne in mind here in Western Europe and all the world over. But the workers in Western Europe stand alone: this should never be forgotten in Russia.

The proletariat in Western Europe stands alone.

This is the absolute truth: and on this truth our tactics must be based. All tactics that are not based on this are false, and lead the proletariat to terrible defeat.

Practice also has proved that these assertions are true, for the poor peasants in Western Europe have not only no programme and failed to claim the land, but they do not even stir now that Communism is approaching. As I have observed before, this statement is not to be taken absolutely literally. There are regions in Western Europe where, as we have mentioned before, landed property on a large scale is predominant, and where the peasants are therefore in favour of Communism. There are yet other regions where the local conditions are such that the poor peasants may be won for Communism. But these regions are comparatively small. Neither do I wish to imply that

quite at the dose of the revolution, when all things are coming down, there will be no poor peasants doming to our side. They undoubtedly will. That is why we must carry on an unceasing propaganda amongst them. Our tactics, however, must be adopted for the beginning and for the course of the revolution. What I mean is the general trend, the general tendency of conditions. And it is on these alone that our tactics must be based.

From this there follows in the first place – and it should be clearly, emphatically and plainly stated – that in Western Europe the real revolution, that is to say the overthrow of Capitalism, and the erection and permanent institution of Communism, for the time being is possible only in those countries where the proletariat *BY ITSELF* is strong enough against all the other classes – in Germany, England, and Italy, where the help of the poor peasants is not possible. In the other countries the revolution can only be prepared as yet by means of propaganda, organisation and fighting. The revolution itself can only follow when the economic conditions will be thus much shaken through the revolution in the big States (Russia, Germany, and England), that the bourgeois class will have grown sufficiently weak. For you will agree with me that we cannot base our tactics on events that may come, but that may also never happen (help from the Russian armies, risings in India, terrible crises, etc., etc.).

That you should have failed to recognise this truth concerning the importance of the poor peasants, Comrade, is your first great mistake, and likewise that of the Executive in Moscow and of the International Congress.

What does it mean with regard to tactics, this fact that the proletariat of Western Europe stands all alone: that it has no prospect of any help whatsoever from any other class?

It means, in the first place, that the demands made on the masses are far greater here than in Russia – that, therefore, the proletarian mass is of far greater importance in the revolution. And in the second place that the importance of the leaders is proportionately smaller.

For the Russian masses, the proletarians, knew for certain, and already saw during the war, and in part before their very eyes, that the peasants would soon be on their side. The German proletarians, to take them first, know that they will be opposed by German Capitalism in its entirety, with all its classes.

It is true that already before the war the German proletarians numbered from nineteen to twenty million actual workers, of a population of seventy million, but they stood alone against all the other classes. They are opposed by a Capitalism that is immeasurably stronger than that of Russia – and they are UNARMED. The Russians were armed.

From every German proletarian therefore, from every individual, the revolution demands a far greater courage and spirit of sacrifice than was necessary in Russia.

This is the outcome of the economic class relations in Germany, and not of some theory or idea risen from the brain of revolutionary romantics or intellectuals!

Unless the entire class or at least the great majority stand up for the revolution personally, with almost superhuman force, in opposition to all the other classes, the revolution will fail; for you will agree with me again that on determining our tactics we should reckon with our own forces, not with those from outside – on Russian help, for instance.

The proletariat almost unarmed, alone, without help, against a closely united Capitalism, means for Germany that every proletarian must be a conscious fighter, every proletarian a hero; and it is the same for all Western Europe.

For the majority of the proletariat to turn into conscious, steadfast fighters, into real Communists, they must be greater, immeasurably greater, here than in Russia, in an absolute as well as a relative sense. And once more: this is the outcome, not of the representations, the dreams of some

intellectual, or poet, but of the purest realities.

And as the importance of the class grows, the importance of the leaders becomes relatively less. This does not mean that we must not have the very best of leaders. The best are not good enough; we are trying hard to find them. It only means that the importance of the leaders, as compared to that of the masses, is decreasing.

For you, who had to win a country of 160 million, with the help of seven or eight million, the importance of the leaders was certainly immense! To triumph over so many, with so few, is in the first place a matter of tactics. To do as you did, Comrade, to win such a huge land, with such small forces, but with assistance from outside, all depends in the first place on the tactics of the leader. When you, Comrade Lenin, started the struggle with a small gathering of proletarians, it was in the first place your tactics that in the crucial moments waged the battles and won the poor peasants.

But what about Germany? There the cleverest of tactics, the greatest clarity, even the genius of leaders, cannot attain much. There you have an inexorable class enmity, one against all the others. There the proletarian class must tip the scales for itself – through its power, its numbers. Its power, however, is based above all on its quality, the enemy being so mighty and so endlessly better organised and armed than the proletariat.

You opposed the Russian possessing classes, as David opposed Goliath. David was little, but he had a deadly weapon. The German, the English, the West-European proletariat oppose Capitalism as one giant does another. Between them all depends on strength – strength of body, and above all of mind.

Have you not observed, Comrade Lenin, that in Germany there are no great leaders? They are all quite ordinary men. This points to the fact that this revolution must in the first place be the work of the masses, not of the leaders.

To my idea this is something more wonderful and grand than has ever been, and it is an indication of what Communism will be.

And as it is in Germany, it is in all Western Europe, for everywhere the proletariat stands alone.

The revolution of the masses, of the workers – of the masses of workers alone, for the first time in the world.

And not because thus it is good, or beautiful, or conceived in someone's brain, but because the economic and class relations will it.

In other words, and to read the matter as clearly as possible: the relation between the West-European and the Russian revolution can be demonstrated by means of the following comparison:

Supposing that in an Asiatic country like China or British India, where only one half a per cent of the inhabitants are industrial proletarians, and 80 per cent small peasants, a revolution should break out, and should be successfully carried through by those small peasants under the lead of the politically and socially more trained proletarians that were united in local trade unions and co-operatives. If these Chinese or Indian workers proclaimed to them:

“We have won through our local trade unions and co-operatives, and now you must do the same with regard to your revolution,” what would the Russian workers have replied? They would have said:

“Dear friends, this is impossible. Our country is far more developed than yours. With us not half, but three per cent of the population are industrial proletarians. Our Capitalism is more powerful than yours, therefore we need better and more powerful organisations than you did”.

From this difference between Russia and Western Europe there follows likewise:

1. That when you, or the Executive in Moscow, or the opportunist Communists of Western Europe, of the Spartakus League, or of the English Communist Party, say: “It is nonsense to fight

about the question of leader or masses,” that you in that case are wrong as regards us, not only because we are yet trying to find those leaders, but also because for you this question has quite another meaning.

2. That when you say to us: “Leader and mass must be one inseparable whole,” you are wrong, not only because we are striving for that unity, but also because that question has another meaning for you than for us.

3. That when you say: “In the Communist Party there should reign iron discipline, and absolute military centralisation,” this is wrong, not only because we are seeking iron discipline and strong centralisation, but also because this question has a different meaning for us and for you.

4. That when you say: “We acted in such and such a way in Russia (after the Kornilov offensive for instance, or some other episode), or entered Parliament during this or that period, or we remained in the trade unions, and therefore the German proletariat must do the same,” all this means absolutely nothing, and need not or cannot be applicable in any way. For the West-European class relations in the struggle, in the revolution, are quite different from those of Russia.

5. That when you wish to force upon us tactics that were good in Russia – tactics, for instance, that were based, consciously or unconsciously, on the conviction that here the poor peasants will soon join the proletariat – in other words, that the proletariat does not stand alone – that your tactics, which you prescribe, and which are followed here, will lead the West-European proletariat into ruin, and the most terrible defeat.

6. That when you, or the Executive in Moscow, or the opportunist elements in Western Europe, like the Central Board of the Spartakus League or the BSP, try to compel us to follow opportunist tactics (opportunism always seeks the support of outside elements, that forsake the proletariat), you are wrong.

The general bases on which the tactics in Western Europe must be founded are these: the recognition that the proletariat stands alone, that it is to expect no help, that the importance of the mass is greater, and that of the leaders relatively smaller.

This was not seen by Radek when he was in Germany, not by the Executive in Moscow, nor by you, as is evident from your words.

And it is on these bases that the tactics of the Kommunistische-Arbeiter Partei in Germany, the Communist Party of Sylvia Pankhurst, and the majority of the Amsterdam Commission, as appointed by Moscow, are founded.

It is on these grounds that they strive, above all, to raise the masses as a whole, and the individuals to a higher level, to educate them one by one to be revolutionary fighters, by making them realise (not through theory only, but especially by practice), that all depends on them, that they are to expect nothing from foreign help, very little from leaders, and all from themselves.

Theoretically, therefore, and apart from private utterances, minor questions and excrescences, which like those of Wolffheim and Laufenberg, are inevitable in the first phases of a movement, the view taken by these parties and comrades is quite right, and your opposition absolutely wrong.

On going from the East to the West of Europe, we traverse at a given moment an economic boundary. It runs from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, somewhere from Danzig to Venice. This line divides two worlds. West of this line there is a practically absolute domination of industrial, commercial and financial capital, united in the most highly developed banking capital.

Even agricultural capital is subject to, or has been compelled to unite with, this capital. This capital is organised to the utmost degree, and converges in the most firmly established State Governments of the world.

East of the line there is neither this gigantic development of industrial, commercial, transport

and banking capital, not its almost absolute domination, nor, consequently, the firmly established modern State.

It would be marvellous, indeed, if the tactics of the revolutionary proletariat west of this boundary-line were the same as in the east!

6.4 Grigory Zinoviev, *Theses on the Conditions of Admission to the Communist International* (1920)

Zinoviev: The First Congress of the Communist International did not draw up precise conditions for admission to the Communist International. Until the time the first congress was convened there were in most countries only communist *trends* and *groups*. The Second Congress of the Communist International meets under different conditions. At the present time there are in most countries not only communist trends and tendencies, but communist *parties* and *organisations*.

Now parties and groups often turn to the Communist International which quite recently belonged to the Second International, which wish to join the Communist International but which have not, in fact, become communist. The Second International has been finally smashed to pieces. The parties in between and the “centre” groups, which realise the hopelessness of the Second International, now try to lean upon the Communist International, which is becoming more and more powerful. In the process, however, they hope to retain an “autonomy” that will permit them to continue their previous opportunist or “centrist” policies. To a certain extent the Communist International is becoming fashionable.

The desire of certain leading “centrist” groups to join the Communist International is an indirect confirmation of the fact that the Communist International has gained the sympathy of the overwhelming majority of class-conscious workers all over the world and that it is becoming a force that grows more powerful each day.

The Communist International is threatened by the danger of being watered down by elements characterised by vacillation and half-measures, which have not yet finally discarded the ideology of the Second International.

Moreover, to this very day there remains in some big parties (Italy, Sweden, Norway, Yugoslavia, among others), whose majorities have adopted the standpoint of communism, a significant reformist and social-pacifist wing which is only waiting for the opportunity to raise its head again, to start active sabotage of the proletarian revolution and thus to help the bourgeoisie and the Second International.

Not a single communist may forget the lessons of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The fusion of the Hungarian communists with the so-called “left” social democrats cost the Hungarian proletariat dear.

Consequently the Second Congress of the Communist International considers it necessary to establish quite precisely the conditions for the admittance of new parties and to point out to those parties that have been admitted to the Communist International the duties incumbent on them.

The Second Congress of the Communist International lays down the following conditions of membership of the Communist International:

1. All propaganda and agitation must bear a really communist character and correspond to the programme and decisions of the Communist International. All the party’s press organs must be run by reliable communists who have proved their devotion to the cause of the proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat must not be treated simply as a current formula learnt off by heart.

Propaganda for it must be carried out in such a way that its necessity is comprehensible to every simple worker, every woman worker, every soldier and peasant from the facts of their daily lives, which must be observed systematically by our press and used day by day.

The periodical and other press and all the party's publishing institutions must be subordinated to the party leadership, regardless of whether, at any given moment, the party as a whole is legal or illegal. The publishing houses must not be allowed to abuse their independence and pursue policies that do not entirely correspond to the policies of the party.

In the columns of the press, at public meetings, in the trades unions, in the co-operatives – wherever the members of the Communist International can gain admittance – it is necessary to brand not only the bourgeoisie but also its helpers, the reformists of every shade, systematically and pitilessly.

2. Every organisation that wishes to affiliate to the Communist International must regularly and methodically remove reformists and centrists from every responsible post in the labour movement (party organisations, editorial boards, trades unions, parliamentary factions, co-operatives, local government) and replace them with tested communists, without worrying unduly about the fact that, particularly at first, ordinary workers from the masses will be replacing “experienced” opportunists.

3. In almost every country in Europe and America the class struggle is entering the phase of civil war. Under such conditions the communists can place no trust in bourgeois legality. They have the obligation of setting up a parallel organisational apparatus which, at the decisive moment, can assist the party to do its duty to the revolution. In every country where a state of siege or emergency laws deprive the communists of the opportunity of carrying on all their work legally, it is absolutely necessary to combine legal and illegal activity.

4. The duty of propagating communist ideas includes the special obligation of forceful and systematic propaganda in the army. Where this agitation is interrupted by emergency laws it must be continued illegally. Refusal to carry out such work would be tantamount to a betrayal of revolutionary duty and would be incompatible with membership of the Communist International.

5. Systematic and methodical agitation is necessary in the countryside. The working class will not be able to win if it does not have the backing of the rural proletariat and at least a part of the poorest peasants, and if it does not secure the neutrality of at least a part of the rest of the rural population through its policies. Communist work in the countryside is taking on enormous importance at the moment. It must be carried out principally with the help of revolutionary communist *workers* of the town and country who have connections with the countryside. To refuse to carry this work out, or to entrust it to unreliable, semi-reformist hands, is tantamount to renouncing the proletarian revolution.

6. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International has the obligation to unmask not only open social-patriotism but also the insincerity and hypocrisy of social-pacifism, to show the workers systematically that, without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, no international court of arbitration, no agreement on the limitation of armaments, no “democratic” reorganisation of the League of Nations will be able to prevent new imperialist wars.

7. The parties that wish to belong to the Communist International have the obligation of recognising the necessity of a complete break with reformism and “centrist” politics and of spreading this break among the widest possible circles of their party members. Consistent communist politics are impossible without this.

The Communist International unconditionally and categorically demands the carrying out of this break in the shortest possible time. The Communist International cannot tolerate a situation

where notorious opportunists, as represented by Turati, Modigliani, Kautsky, Hilferding, Hillquit, Longuet, MacDonald, etc., have the right to pass as members of the Communist International. This could only lead to the Communist International becoming something very similar to the wreck of the Second International.

8. A particularly marked and clear attitude on the question of the colonies and oppressed nations is necessary on the part of the communist parties of those countries whose bourgeoisies are in possession of colonies and oppress other nations. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International has the obligation of exposing the dodges of its "own" imperialists in the colonies, of supporting every liberation movement in the colonies not only in words but in deeds, of demanding that their imperialist compatriots should be thrown out of the colonies, of cultivating in the hearts of the workers in their own country a truly fraternal relationship to the working population in the colonies and to the oppressed nations, and of carrying out systematic propaganda among their own country's troops against any oppression of colonial peoples.

9. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International must systematically and persistently develop communist activities within the trades unions, workers' and works councils, the consumer co-operatives and other mass workers' organisations. Within these organisations it is necessary to organise communist cells which are to win the trades unions etc. for the cause of communism by incessant and persistent work. In their daily work the cells have the obligation to expose everywhere the treachery of the social patriots and the vacillations of the "centrists". The communist cells must be completely subordinated to the party as a whole.

10. Every party belonging to the Communist International has the obligation to wage a stubborn struggle against the Amsterdam "International" of yellow trade union organisations. It must expound as forcefully as possible among trades unionists the idea of the necessity of the break with the yellow Amsterdam International. It must support the International Association of Red Trades Unions affiliated to the Communist International, at present in the process of formation, with every means at its disposal.

11. Parties that wish to belong to the Communist International have the obligation to subject the personal composition of their parliamentary factions to review, to remove all unreliable elements from them and to subordinate these factions to the party leadership, not only in words but also in deeds, by calling on every individual communist member of parliament to subordinate the whole of his activity to the interests of really revolutionary propaganda and agitation.

12. The parties belonging to the Communist International must be built on the basis of the principle of *democratic centralism*. In the present epoch of acute civil war the communist party will only be able to fulfil its duty if it is organised in as centralist a manner as possible, if iron discipline reigns within it and if the party centre, sustained by the confidence of the party membership, is endowed with the fullest rights and authority and the most far-reaching powers.

13. The communist parties of those countries in which the communists can carry out their work legally must from time to time undertake purges (re-registration) of the membership of their party organisations in order to cleanse the party systematically of the petty-bourgeois elements within it.

14. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International has the obligation to give unconditional support to every soviet republic in its struggle against the forces of counter-revolution. The communist parties must carry out clear propaganda to prevent the transport of war material to the enemies of the soviet republics. They must also carry out legal or illegal propaganda, etc., with every means at their disposal among troops sent to stifle workers' republics.

15. Parties that have still retained their old social democratic programmes have the obligation of changing those programmes as quickly as possible and working out a new communist programme

corresponding to the particular conditions in the country and in accordance with the decisions of the Communist International.

As a rule the programme of every party belonging to the Communist International must be ratified by a regular Congress of the Communist International or by the Executive Committee. Should the Executive Committee of the Communist International reject a party's programme, the party in question has the right of appeal to the Congress of the Communist International.

16. All decisions of the Congresses of the Communist International and decisions of its Executive Committee are binding on all parties belonging to the Communist International. The Communist International, acting under conditions of the most acute civil war, must be built in a far more centralist manner than was the case with the Second International. In the process the Communist International and its Executive Committee must, of course, in the whole of its activity, take into account the differing conditions under which the individual parties have to fight and work, and only take generally binding decisions in cases where such decisions are possible.

17. In this connection all those parties that wish to belong to the Communist International must change their names. Every party that wishes to belong to the Communist International must bear the name *Communist* Party of this or that country (Section of the Communist International). The question of the name is not formal, but a highly political question of great importance. The Communist International has declared war on the whole bourgeois world and on all yellow social-democratic parties. The difference between the communist parties and the old official "social-democratic" or "socialist" parties that have betrayed the banner of the working class must be clear to every simple toiler.

18. All the leading press organs of the parties in every country have the duty of printing all the important official documents of the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

19. All parties that belong to the Communist International or have submitted an application for membership have the duty of calling a special congress as soon as possible, and in no case later than four months after the Second Congress of the Communist International, in order to check all these conditions. In this connection all party centres must see that the decisions of the Second Congress are known to all their local organisations.

20. Those parties that now wish to enter the Communist International but have not yet radically altered their previous tactics must, before they join the Communist International, see to it that no less than two thirds of the central committee and of all their most important central institutions consist of comrades who even before the Second Congress of the Communist International spoke out unambiguously in public in favour of the entry of the party into the Communist International. Exceptions may be permitted with the agreement of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The Executive Committee of the Communist International also has the right to make exceptions in relation to the representatives of the centrist tendency mentioned in paragraph 7.

21. Those party members who fundamentally reject the conditions and Theses laid down by the Communist International are to be expelled from the party.

The same will apply particularly to delegates to the special party congress.

Week 7

German and Italian Revolutions

With the end of the First World War came a revolutionary wave that extended across the European continent. Germany and Italy in particular experienced abrupt yet intense revolts which would give birth to two distinct ultra-left tendencies: the Dutch-German Communist Left and the Bordigist current. Forged in the crucible of revolutionary upheaval and witnessing the limits of electoral politics and trade unionism, both these tendencies sought to discover anew the motor force of the revolutionary process; was it the party or council organizations?

In Germany, the 1918 November revolution produced a variety of political formations attempting to reconceive the role of the party. This question was a point of contention that produced a series of oppositions and splits. The Communist Worker's Party of Germany (KAPD) was the product of a mass expulsion of left oppositionists within the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1920. In 1922, the KAPD itself also split into two tendencies, one located in Berlin and the other in Essen. The *Programme of the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD)* put forward the conception of a new kind of proletarian party emphasizing autonomy and proletarian initiative as opposed to the rigid centralism expounded by older party formations. However, other political formations questioned the historical validity of the party-form, encapsulated in Otto Rühle's *The Revolution is Not a Party Affair*. Another such conception is theorized in Fritz Wolffheim's *Factory Organizations or Trade Unions?*, which emphasizes the importance of taking hold of the economic sphere over state power.

In Italy a rank and file workers' movement came into existence immediately after the War culminating into a series of factory occupations in 1920. Amadeo Bordiga was a prominent leader in the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and later the Communist Party of Italy (PCI). He emphasized the importance of the party and conquering the state as the definitive basis of the revolution and in this regard practiced political intransigence in the face of reformism and the united front tactic. This can be seen in both his essays, *Party and Class* and *Towards the Establishment of Workers' Councils in Italy*. Antonio Gramsci was to succeed Bordiga as secretary of the PCI and criticized the ossification of the trade union bureaucracy as an obstacle to the revolution. Both his pieces, *Unions and Councils* and *Unions and the Dictatorship* criticize the reactionary character of the trade unions in the Italian workers' movement.

The Eley chapters for this week are 10 and 11.

7.1 Programme of the Communist Workers Party of Germany (KAPD) (1920)

The world economic crisis, born from the world war, with its monstrous social and economic effects which produce the thunderstruck impression of a field of ruins of colossal dimensions, can only signify one thing: the Twilight of the Gods of the bourgeois-capitalist world order is nigh. Today, it is not a question of the periodic economic crises which were once a part of the capitalist mode of production; it is the *crisis* of capitalism itself; we are witnessing convulsive spasms of the whole of the social organism, formidable outbursts of class antagonisms of an unprecedented pitch, general misery for wide layers of populations: all this is a fateful warning to bourgeois society. It appears more and more clearly that the ever-growing antagonism between exploiters and exploited, that the contradiction between capital and labour, the consciousness of which is becoming more widespread even among those previously apathetic layers of the proletariat, cannot be resolved. Capitalism is experiencing its definitive failure, it has plunged itself into the abyss in a war of imperialist robbery; it has created a chaos whose unbearable prolongation places the proletariat in front of the historic alternative: relapse into barbarism or construction of a socialist world.

Of all the peoples of the Earth only the Russian proletariat has up to now succeeded in its titanic struggle to overthrow the domination of its capitalist class and seize political power. In a heroic resistance it has pushed back the concentrated attack of the army of mercenaries organised by international capital, and it now confronts a task of unsurpassed difficulty: that of reconstructing, on a socialist basis, an economy totally destroyed by world war and the civil war which followed it for more than two years. The fate of the Russian republic of councils depends on the development of the proletarian revolution in Germany. After the victory of the German revolution we will see the emergence of a socialist economic bloc which, through the reciprocal exchange of the products of industry and agriculture, will be capable of establishing a real socialist mode of production, no longer obliged to make economic, and thus also political, concessions to world capital. If the German proletariat doesn't fulfil its historic task very soon, the development of the world revolution will be called into question for years, if not for decades. In fact it is Germany which is today the key to the world revolution. The revolution in the "victor" countries of the Entente can only get underway when the great barrier of central Europe has been raised. The economic conditions of the proletarian revolution are incomparably more favourable in Germany than in the "victor" countries of western Europe. The German economy, ruthlessly plundered after the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty, has brought to a head a degree of pauperisation which demands a rapid and radical solution. Furthermore, the peace of the brigands of Versailles does not only weigh on the capitalist mode of production in Germany, but makes life increasingly unendurable for the proletariat as well. Its most dangerous aspect is that it undermines the economic foundations of the future socialist economy in Germany, and thus, in this sense, also calls into question the development of the world revolution. Only one headlong push forward by the German proletarian revolution can bring us out of this dilemma. The economic and political situation in Germany is more than ripe for the outbreak of proletarian revolution. At this stage of historic evolution, where the process of the decomposition of capitalism can no longer be artificially obscured, the proletariat has to become aware that it needs an energetic intervention in order to effectively use the power that it already possesses. In an epoch of revolutionary class struggle like this, where the last phase of the struggle between capital and labour has begun and where the decisive combat itself is already underway, there can be no question of compromise with the enemy, but only a fight to the death. In particular, it is necessary to attack the institutions which seek to make a bridge across the gulf of class antagonisms and which

orient themselves towards class collaboration between exploiters and exploited. At a time when the objective conditions for the outbreak of the proletarian revolution have already arrived, and when the permanent crisis can only get worse and worse, there must be reasons of a subjective nature that are holding back the accelerated progress of the revolution. In other words: the consciousness of the proletariat is still partly trapped by bourgeois or petty-bourgeois ideology. The psychology of the German proletariat, in its present aspect, shows very distinct traces of a long-standing enslavement to militarism, and is characterised by a real lack of self-awareness. This is the natural product of the parliamentary cretinism of the old Social Democracy and of the USPD on one side, and of the absolutism of the union bureaucracy on the other. These subjective elements play a decisive role in the German revolution. The problem of the German revolution is the problem of *the development of the German proletariat's consciousness of itself*.

Recognising this situation and the necessity to accelerate the rhythm of the development of the revolution in the world, as well as being faithful to the spirit of the 3rd International, the KAPD is fighting for the maximum demand of the immediate abolition of bourgeois democracy and the establishment of the dictatorship of the working class. It rejects in the democratic constitution the principle, doubly absurd and untenable in the present period, of conceding to the exploiting capitalist class political rights and the power to exclusively dispose of the means of production.

In conformity with its maximalist views the KAPD equally declares itself for the rejection of all reformist and opportunist methods of struggle, which is only a way of avoiding serious and decisive struggles with the bourgeois class. The party doesn't seek to avoid these struggles, but on the contrary actively encourages them. In a State which carries all the symptoms of the period of the decadence of capitalism, the participation in parliamentarism is also part of these reformist and opportunist methods. In such a period, to exhort the proletariat to participate in parliamentary elections can only nourish the dangerous illusion that the crisis can be overcome through parliamentary means. It means resorting to a means used in the past by the bourgeoisie in its class struggle, whereas we are now in a situation where only the methods of proletarian class struggle, applied in a resolute and forthright manner, can have a decisive effect. Participation in bourgeois parliamentarism in the thick of the proletarian revolution can only signify the sabotage of the idea of the councils.

The idea of the councils in the period of proletarian struggle for political power is at the centre of the revolutionary process. The more or less strong echo that the idea of the councils arouses in the consciousness of the masses is the thermometer which makes it possible to measure the development of the social revolution. The struggle for the recognition of the revolutionary factory councils and political workers' councils in the framework of a given revolutionary situation logically gives rise to the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat against the dictatorship of capitalism. This revolutionary struggle, whose specific political axis is constituted by the idea of the councils, is compelled, under the pressure of historic necessity, to come up against the totality of bourgeois social order and thus also against its political form, bourgeois parliamentarism. The system of councils or parliamentarism? It is a question of historic importance. To build a proletarian-communist world or to be shipwrecked in the storms of bourgeois-capitalist anarchy? In a situation as totally revolutionary as the present situation in Germany, participation in parliamentarism thus signifies not only the sabotage of the idea of councils, but also helps to give the putrefying bourgeois order a new lease of life, and thus to obstruct the progress of the proletarian revolution.

Aside from bourgeois parliamentarism, the unions form the principal rampart against the further development of the proletarian revolution in Germany. Their attitude during the world war is well-known. Their decisive influence on the principal orientation and tactics of the old Social Democratic

Party led to the proclamation of the “Union Sacrée” with the German bourgeoisie, which was equivalent to a declaration of war on the international proletariat. Their efficacy as social-traitors found its logical continuation at the time of the outbreak of the November 1918 revolution in Germany. Here they showed their counter-revolutionary intentions by co-operating with crisis-ridden German industrialists to set up a “community of labour” (Arbeitsgemeinschaft) for social peace. They have maintained their counter-revolutionary attitude up to today, throughout the whole period of the German revolution. It is the bureaucracy of the unions which have most violently opposed the idea of the councils which was taking more and more profound root in the German working class; it is the unions who found the means to successfully paralyse all strivings for proletarian political power, which logically resulted from mass actions on the economic terrain. The counter-revolutionary character of the union organisations is so notorious that numerous bosses in Germany will only take on workers belonging to a union group. This reveals to the whole world that the union bureaucracy will take an active part in the maintenance of a capitalist system which is coming apart at the seams. The unions are thus, alongside the bourgeois substructure, one of the principal pillars of the capitalist state. Union history over these last 18 months has amply demonstrated that this counter-revolutionary formation cannot be transformed from the inside. The revolutionising of the unions is not a question of individuals: the counter-revolutionary character of these organisation is located in their structure and in their specific way of operating. From this it flows logically that only the *destruction of the unions* can clear the road for social revolution in Germany. The building of socialism needs something other than these fossilised organisations.

It is in the mass struggles that the factory organisation appears. It surfaces as something which hasn't had and couldn't have any equivalent, but that is not its novelty. What is new is that it penetrates everywhere during the revolution, as a necessary arm of the class struggle against the old spirit and the old foundations which were its base. It corresponds to the idea of the councils; that is why it is absolutely not a pure form or a new organisational trick, or even a “dark mystery”; organically born in the future, constituting the future, it is the form of expression of a social revolution which tends towards a society without classes. It is an organisation of pure proletarian struggle. The proletariat cannot be organised for the merciless overthrow of the old society if it is torn into strips by job category, away from its terrain of struggle; it must carry out its struggle in the factory. It is here that workers stand side by side as comrades; it is here that all are forced to be equal. It is here that the masses are the motor of production and are ceaselessly pushed to take control of production, to unveil its secrets. It is here that the ideological struggle, the revolutionising of consciousness, undergoes a permanent tumult, from man to man, from mass to mass. Everything is oriented towards the supreme class interest, not towards the craze for founding organisations, and the particular job interests are reduced to the measure which is due to them. Such an organisation, the dorsal fin of the factory councils, becomes an infinitely more supple instrument of the class struggle, always an organism receiving fresh blood, owing to the permanent possibility of re-elections, revocation, etc. Going forward in the mass actions and along with them, the factory organisations will naturally have to create for themselves the centralised organs which correspond to their revolutionary development. Their principal business will be the development of the revolution and not programmes, statutes and plans in detail. It is not a credit bank or life assurance, even if - this goes without saying - it makes collections when it's necessary to support strikes. Uninterrupted propaganda for socialism, factory assemblies, political discussions etc., all that is part of its tasks; in brief, it is the revolution in the factory.

In the main, the aim of the factory organisation is twofold. The first aim is the destruction of the unions, the totality of their bases and all the non-proletarian ideas which are concentrated

around them. No doubt of course in this struggle the factory organisation will meet as desperate enemies all the bourgeois formations; but the same applies to the partisans of the USPD and the KPD, in so far as the latter are trapped unawares in the old schemas of Social Democracy. (even if they adopt a politically different programme, they essentially remain a politico-moral critique of the "errors" of Social Democracy). These tendencies can even act as open enemies, inasmuch as in their eyes political trafficking and the diplomatic arts are still "above" the gigantic social struggle in general. Faced with these petty drudges one can have no scruples. There can be no agreement with the USPD as they do not recognise the justification of factory organisations, on the basis of the struggle for workers' councils. A great number of the masses already recognise them, rather than the USPD, as their political leadership. This is a good sign. The factory organisation, by unleashing mass strikes and by transforming their political orientation, basing themselves every time on the political situation of the moment, will contribute much more rapidly and much more thoroughly to unmasking and destroying the counter-revolutionary trade unions.

The second great aim of the factory organisation is to prepare for the building of communist society. Any worker who declares for the dictatorship of the proletariat can become a member. Moreover it is necessary to resolutely reject the trade unions, and to be resolutely free from their ideological orientation. This last condition will be the cornerstone for being admitted into the factory organisation. It is through this that one shows one's adhesion to the proletarian class struggle and to its own methods; we do not demand adhesion to a more precise party programme. Through its nature and its inherent tendencies the factory organisation serves communism and leads to the communist society. Its kernel will always be expressly communist, its struggle pushes everyone in the same direction. On the other hand, the programme of the party has to deal with social reality in its widest sense; and the most serious intellectual qualities are demanded from party members. A political party like the KAPD, which goes forward and rapidly modifies itself in liaison with the world revolutionary process, can never have a great quantitative importance (if it is not to regress and become corrupt). But the revolutionary masses are, on the contrary, united in the factory organisations through their class solidarity, through the consciousness of belonging to the proletariat. It is this which organically prepares the unity of the proletariat; whereas on the basis of a party programme alone this unity is never possible. The factory organisation is the beginning of the communist form and becomes the foundation of the communist society to come.

The factory organisation carries out its tasks in close union with the KAPD.

The political organisation has the task of bringing together the most advanced elements of the working class on the basis of the party programme.

The relationship of the party to the factory organisation comes from the nature of the factory organisation. The work of the KAPD inside these organisations will be that of an unflagging propaganda, as well as putting forward the slogans of the struggle. The revolutionary cadres in the factory become the mobile arm of the party. Further, it is naturally necessary that the party always takes on for itself a more proletarian character, that it complies with the dictatorship from below. Through this the circle of its tasks grows wider, but at the same time it acquires the most powerful support. What has to be achieved is that the victory (the taking of power by the proletariat) ends up in the dictatorship of the class and not the dictatorship of a few party leaders and their clique. The factory organisation is the guarantee of this.

The phase of taking political power by the proletariat demands the firmest repression of capitalist-bourgeois movements. That will be achieved by putting in place an organisation of councils exercising the totality of political and economic power. In this phase the factory organisation itself becomes an element of the proletarian dictatorship, carried through into the factory. This latter

moreover has the task of transforming itself into the base unit of the councils' economic system.

The factory organisation is an economic condition for the construction of the communist community (Gemeinwesen). The political form of the organisation of the communist community is the system of the councils. The factory organisation intervenes so that political power is only exercised by the executive of the councils.

The KAPD thus struggles for the realisation of the maximum revolutionary programme, the concrete demands of which are contained in the following points:

Political domain

1. Immediate political and economic fusion with all victorious proletarian countries (Soviet Russia, etc.), in the spirit of the international class struggle, with the aim of a common self-defence against the aggressive actions of world capital.

2. Arming of the politically organised revolutionary working class, setting up local military defence groups (Ortswehren), the formation of a Red Army; disarmament of the bourgeoisie, of all police, all officers, of 'citizens' defence groups (Einwohnerwehren), etc.

3. Dissolution of all parliaments and all municipal councils.

4. Formation of workers' councils as legislative and executive organs of power. Election of a central council of delegates of the workers' councils of Germany.

5. Meeting of a congress of German councils as a supreme political authority of the Councils of Germany.

6. Taking over control of the press by the working class under the leadership of the local political councils.

7. Destruction of the bourgeois judicial apparatus and the immediate installation of revolutionary tribunals. Taking charge of the bourgeois prison system and the security services by appropriate proletarian organs.

Economic, social and structural domain

1. Cancellation of state and other public debts, cancellation of war reparations.

2. Expropriation by the republic of councils of all banks, mines, foundries as well as the large firms of industry and commerce.

3. Confiscation of all wealth over a certain threshold, the latter fixed by the central council of the workers' councils of Germany.

4. Transformation of private landed property into collective property under the leadership of the competent local and rural councils (Gutsräte).

5. The republic of councils to take charge of all public transports.

6. Regulation and central management of the totality of production by the higher economic councils, which must be mandated by the congress of economic councils.

7. Adaption of the whole of production to need, based on the most detailed statistical economic calculations.

8. Ruthless enforcement of the obligation to work.

9. Guarantee of individual existence relative to food, clothing, housing, old age, sickness, invalidity, etc.

10. Abolition of all caste, decorative and titled differences. Complete juridical and social equality of the sexes.

11. Immediate radical transformation of provisions, housing and health in the interests of the proletarian population.

12. At the same time as the KAPD declares the most resolute war on the capitalist mode of production and the bourgeois state, it directs its attack against the totality of bourgeois ideology

and makes itself the pioneer of a world proletarian-revolutionary conception. An essential factor in the acceleration of the social revolution resides in the revolutionising of the whole intellectual world of the proletariat. Conscious of this fact, the KAPD supports all revolutionary tendencies in science and the arts, all those elements which correspond to the spirit of the *proletarian* revolution.

In particular, the KAPD encourages all serious revolutionary efforts which allow the youth of both sexes to express themselves. The KAPD rejects all domination over youth. The political struggle compels the youth to attain a superior development of its forces; this gives us the certitude that it will accomplish its greatest tasks with a total clarity and resolution. In the interests of the revolution, it is the duty of the KAPD that youth gets all the support possible in its struggle.

The KAPD is conscious also that after the conquest of political power by the proletariat, a great domain of activity falls upon youth in the construction of communist society: the defence of the republic of councils by the Red Army, the transformation of the process of production, the creation of communist labour schools which will carry out their creative tasks in close connection with the factory.

This then is the programme of the Communist Workers' Party of Germany. Faithful to the spirit of the Third International, the KAPD remains attached to the idea of the founders of scientific socialism, according to which the conquest of political power by the proletariat signifies the destruction of the political power of the bourgeoisie. To destroy the totality of the bourgeois state apparatus with its capitalist army under the leadership of bourgeois and landed officers, with its police, its gaolers and its judges, with its priests and bureaucrats – here is the first task of the proletarian revolution. The victorious proletariat must be steeled against the blows of the bourgeois counter-revolution. When this is imposed on it by the bourgeoisie, the proletariat must strive to crush the exploiters' civil war with a ruthless violence. The KAPD is conscious that the final struggle between capital and labour cannot be settled inside national frontiers. As little as capitalism stops in front of national frontiers and holds back due to some national scruple or other in its incursion through the world, as little can the proletariat afford to be hypnotised by nationalist ideology and lose sight of the fundamental idea of international class solidarity. The more the idea of the international class struggle is clearly grasped by the proletariat, the more it will become the leitmotif of world proletarian policy, and the more impulsive and massive will be the blows of the world revolution which will break into pieces the decomposing capitalist world. Beyond all national particularities, beyond all frontiers and all fatherlands, the eternal beacon shines for the proletariat: *proletarians of all countries, unite!*

7.2 Otto Rühle, The Revolution is Not a Party Affair (1920)

Parliamentarism appeared with the domination of the bourgeoisie. Political parties appeared with parliament.

In parliaments the bourgeois epoch found the historical arena of its first contentions with the crown and nobility. It organised itself politically and gave legislation a form corresponding to the needs of capitalism. But capitalism is not something homogeneous. The various strata and interest groups within the bourgeoisie each developed demands with differing natures. In order to bring these demands to a successful conclusion, the parties were created which sent their representatives and activists to the parliaments. Parliament became a forum, a place for all the struggles for economic and political power, at first for legislative power but then, within the framework of the parliamentary system, for governmental power. But the parliamentary struggles as struggles between parties, are only battles of words. Programmes, journalistic polemics, tracts, meeting reports, resolutions,

parliamentary debates, decisions nothing but words. Parliament degenerated into a talking shop (increasingly as time passed). But from the start parties were only mere machines for preparing for elections. It was no chance that they originally were called "electoral associations."

The bourgeoisie, parliamentarism, and political parties mutually and reciprocally conditioned one another. Each is necessary for the others. None is conceivable without the others. They mark the political physiognomy of the bourgeois system, of the bourgeois-capitalist system.

The revolution of 1848 was still-born. But the democratic state, the ideal of the bourgeois era was erected. The bourgeoisie, impotent and faint-hearted by nature provided no force and displayed no will to realise this ideal in the struggle. It knuckled under to the crown and the nobility, contenting itself with the right to exploit the masses economically and so reducing parliamentarism to a parody.

So resulted the need for the working class to send representatives to parliament. These then took the democratic demands out of the perfidious hands of the bourgeoisie. They carried out energetic propaganda for them. They tried to inscribe them in legislation. Social-Democracy adopted a minimum democratic programme to this end: a programme of immediate and practical demands adapted to the bourgeois period. Its parliamentary activity was dominated by this programme. It was also dominated by a concern to gain the advantages of a legalised field of manoeuvre both for the working class and its own political activity, through the construction and perfection of a liberal-bourgeois formal democracy.

When Wilhelm Liebknecht proposed a refusal to take up parliamentary seats, it was a matter of failing to recognise the historical situation. If Social-Democracy wanted to be effective as a political party, it would have to enter parliament. There was no other way to act and to develop politically.

When the syndicalists turned away from parliamentarism and preached anti-parliamentarism, this did honour to their appreciation of the growing emptiness and corruption of parliamentary practice. But in practice, they demanded something impossible of Social-Democracy: that it take a position contrary to the historical situation and renounce itself. It could not take up this view. As a political party it had to enter parliament.

The KPD has also become a political party, a party in the historical sense, like the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Independent Social-Democrats (USPD).

The leaders have the first say. They speak, they promise, they seduce, they command. The masses, when they are there, find themselves faced with a fait-accompli. They have to form up in ranks and march in step. They have to believe, to be silent, and pay up. They have to receive their orders and carry them out. And they have to vote.

Their leaders want to enter parliament. They have to elect them. Then while the masses abide by silent obedience and devoted passivity, the leaders decide the policy in parliament.

The KPD has become a political party. It also wants to enter parliament. It lies when it tells the masses that it only wants to enter parliament in order to destroy it. It lies when it states that it does not want to carry out any positive work in parliament. It will not destroy parliament; it doesn't want to and it can't. It will do "positive work" in parliament, it is forced to, it wants to. This is its life.

The KPD has become a parliamentary party like any other; a party of compromise, opportunism, criticism and verbal jousting, a party that has ceased to be revolutionary.

Consider this:

It entered parliament. It recognised the trade unions. It bowed before the democratic constitution. It makes peace with the ruling powers. It places itself on the terrain of real force relations. It takes part in the work of national and capitalist reconstruction.

How is it different from the USPD? It criticises instead of repudiating. It acts as the opposition

instead of making the revolution. It bargains instead of acting. It chatters away instead of struggling. That is why it had ceased to be a revolutionary organisation.

It has become a Social-Democratic party. Only a few nuances distinguish it from the Scheidemanns (SPD) and the Daumigs (USPD). This is how it has finished up.

The masses have one consolation: there is an opposition. But this opposition has not broken away from the counter-revolution. What could it do? What has it done? It has assembled and united a political organisation. Was this necessary?

From a revolutionary point of view the most decisive and active elements, the most mature elements have to form themselves into a phalanx of the revolution. They can only do this through a firm and solid foundation. They are the elite of the new revolutionary proletariat. By the firm character of their organisation they gain in strength and their judgment develops a greater profundity. They demonstrate themselves as the vanguard of the proletariat, as an active will in relation to hesitant and confused individuals. At decisive moments they form a magnetic centre of all activity. They are a political organisation but not a political party, not a party in the traditional sense.

The title of the Communist Workers Party (KAPD) is the last external vestige – soon superfluous – of a tradition that can't be simply wiped away when the living mass ideology of yesterday no longer has any relevance. But this last vestige will also be removed.

The organisation of communists in the front line of the revolution must not be the usual sort of party, on pain of death, on pain of following the course of the KPD.

The epoch of the foundation of parties is over, because the epoch of political parties in general is over. The KPD is the last party. Its bankruptcy is the most shameful, its end is without dignity or glory... But what comes of the opposition? of the revolution?

The revolution is not a party affair. The three social-democratic parties (SPD, USPD, KPD) are so foolish as to consider the revolution as their own party affair and to proclaim the victory of the revolution as their party goal. The revolution is the political and economic affair of the totality of the proletarian class. Only the proletariat as a class can lead the revolution to victory. Everything else is superstition, demagogy and political chicanery. The proletariat must be conceived of as a class and its activity for the revolutionary struggle unleashed on the broadest possible basis and in the most extensive framework.

This is why all proletarians ready for revolutionary combat must be got together at the workplace in revolutionary factory organisations, regardless of their political origins or the basis by which they are recruited. Such groups should be united in the framework of the General Workers Union (AAU).

The AAU is not indiscriminate, it is not a hotch-potch nor a chance amalgam. It is a regroupment for all proletarian elements ready for revolutionary activity, who declare themselves for class struggle, the council system and the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is the revolutionary army of the proletariat.

This General Workers Union is taking root in the factories, building itself up in branches of industry from the base up federally at the base, and through revolutionary shop-stewards at the top. It exerts pressure from the base up, from the working masses. It is built according to their needs; it is the flesh and blood of the proletariat; the force that motivates it is the action of the masses; its soul is the burning breath of the revolution. It is not the creation of some leaders, it is not a subtly altered construction. It is neither a political party with parliamentary chatter and paid hacks, nor a trade union. It is the revolutionary proletariat.

So what will the KAPD do?

It will create revolutionary factory organisations. It will propagate the General Workers Union. Factory by factory, industry by industry it will organise the revolutionary masses. They will be

prepared for the onslaught, given the power for decisive combat, until the last resistance offered by capitalism as it collapses is overcome.

It will inspire the fighting masses with confidence in their own strength, the guarantee for victory in that confidence will free them ambitious and traitorous leaders.

From this General Workers Union the communist movement will emerge, starting in the factories, then spreading itself over economic regions and finally over the entire country, i.e. a new communist "party" which is no longer a party, but which is, for the time communist! The heart and head of the revolution!

We shall show this process in a concrete way:

There are 200 men in a factory. Some of them belong to the AAU and agitate for it, at first without success. But during the first struggle the trade unions naturally give in and the old bonds are broken. Some 100 men have gone over to the AAU. Amongst them there are 20 communists, the others being from the USPD, syndicalists and unorganised. At the beginning the USPD inspires most confidence. Its politics dominate the tactics of the struggles carried out in the factory. However slowly but surely, the politics of the USPD are proved false, non-revolutionary. The confidence that the workers have in the USPD decreases. The politics of the communists are confirmed. The 20 communists become 50 then 100 and more. Soon the communist group politically dominates the whole of the factory, determining the tactics of the AAU, at the front of the revolutionary struggle. This is so both at the small scale and large scale. Communist politics take root from factory to factory, from economic region to economic region. They are realised, gaining command becoming both body and head, the guiding principle.

It is from such communist groups in the factories, from mass sections of communists in the economic regions that the new communist movement through the council system will come into being. As for "revolutionising" the trade unions or "restructuring" them. How long will that take? A few years? A few dozen years? Until 1926 perhaps. Anyway, the aim could not be to wipe out the clay giant of the trade unions with their 7 million members in order to reconstruct them in another form.

The aim is to seize hold of the commanding levers of industry for the process of social production and so to decisively carry the day in revolutionary combat, to seize hold of the lever that will let the air out of the capitalist system in entire industrial regions and branches.

It is here, in a mature situation, that the resolute action of a single organisation can completely surpass a general strike in effectiveness. It is here that the David of the factory can defeat the Goliath of the union bureaucracy.

The KPD has ceased to be the incarnation of the communist movement in Germany. Despite its noisy claims about Marx, Lenin and Radek it only forms the latest member of the counter-revolutionary united front. Soon it will present itself as the amiable companion of the SPD and USPD in the framework of a purely "socialist" workers government. Its assurance of being a "loyal" opposition to the murderous parties who have betrayed the workers is the first step. To renounce the revolutionary extermination of the Eberts and the Kautskys is already to tacitly ally oneself with them.

Ebert – Kautsky – Levi. The final stage of capitalism reaches its end, the last political relief of the German bourgeoisie the end.

The end also of parties, the politics of the parties, the deceit and treachery of the parties.

It is a new beginning for the communist movement the communist workers party, the revolutionary factory organisations regrouped in the General Workers Union, the revolutionary councils, the congress of revolutionary councils, the government of the revolutionary councils, the communist

dictatorship of the councils.

7.3 Fritz Wolffheim, Factory Organizations or Trade Unions? (1919)

The German revolution, whose political phase ended on November 9, 1918, meant, in addition to the destruction of German imperialism by means of the war, the destruction of the entire German Empire as well. Once its military power was destroyed, and the workers and soldiers told the big landowners and princes to go to hell, the German Empire, as it had existed until that time, ceased to exist. The German Empire had been, since 1871, a bourgeois class state under the leadership of princes and big landowners. It is true of every state that it provides an organization for the people within its borders. All bourgeois class states involve the concentration of their inhabitants into one nation. A nation is the organization of the people under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. The founding of the nation means that the bourgeoisie is organized as the ruling class, and that it tries to make sure that the subject masses are either totally isolated or believe in an organization which cannot endanger bourgeois rule. As long as a bourgeois state is firmly rooted in the means of political power, the ruling class possesses the power to prevent the proletariat from creating a revolutionary organizational form. If the proletariat wants to organize, it must first acknowledge this state and unite within a framework which the latter generously concedes for a certain form of organization. When the proletariat began its class struggle it confronted the ruling bourgeoisie in a situation where it had no right to organize. So the struggle of the proletariat began with the struggle for its right to freedom of association. This is why, in a military-police-bureaucratic state like the German Empire after 1871, the struggle began with political forms. The political struggle had to build the foundations which would enable the proletariat to construct its own economic organization. The political struggle is also the vehicle for expanding the scope of the freedom conceded by the bourgeoisie to the proletariat to form its own organizations.

This is why, prior to the revolution, both the political and trade union movements, despite their laying claim to the revolutionary traditions of 1848, were essentially reformist. The workers movement was reformist because it recognized the class state, because its principle goal was to try to influence the rulers from within an institution of the class state, from inside parliament. It was reformist in its trade union struggles because, rather than organizing the working class with the objective of destroying the bourgeoisie, and abolishing the principle of hiring wage labor, its goal was to negotiate with the employers, guaranteeing their future existence, and thus to try to obtain more favorable wages and working conditions for particular sectors of the working class. And when the party and trade unions participated in the class struggle, they did so only within the framework of the existing state. Even in the heat of the struggle, in strikes, it was, for the trade unions, not a matter of attempting to destroy the bourgeoisie but of compelling particular groups to yield to certain demands of particular sectors of the working class, demands which were framed so that their satisfaction would be possible, and would by no means jeopardize the future prosperity of capital. This must be kept well in mind if we want to clearly understand whether the trade union form of pre-revolutionary times corresponds to the needs of the German proletariat now that it has carried out a political revolution. Having destroyed the power of the landowners and princes which the bourgeoisie had at its disposal, the originally political revolution has destroyed all powers which could have blocked the proletariat's road to power. Then the proletariat faced the question: what kind of state should be organized? Should a capitalist state or a proletarian

state be born? The old capitalist state was overthrown by the revolution; when it fell, there was no state at all, and the decision concerning what kind of state should replace the old one which had fallen was in the hands of the proletariat. The proletariat has not become aware of this fact; it was not accustomed to reflecting on the nature of the state. The proletariat had customarily restricted its efforts to gathering together a mountain of white slips of paper every five years, so that its so-called representatives could climb up to the heights of parliament. In matters relating to economic organization, the proletariat has been prone, or compelled, to yield all decision-making power to a small group of leaders, and to limit itself to paying its dues, so that a small number of leaders can enjoy a safe and secure existence. These were basically the functions of the proletariat in Germany, and if its trade union and political organizations were used for anything else, it was with the intention of transmitting the stultifying mental training for which the school and the barracks had so nobly prepared the German people, the party and the trade unions, as well as the workers, who might otherwise have developed revolutionary ideas. Since the only thing which the essence of the state has to deal with now is revolutionary activity, it tries with great determination to get the German proletarians to exercise themselves over the question of whether this or that indirect tax is more or less beneficial for the landowners, rather than the problem of analyzing the nature of bourgeois power, and what kind of power the proletariat has to create in order to eventually organize that power as a state. All the Kautskyists spoke of the conquest of power, but how to achieve this conquest is not the subject of their study, nor do they want the workers to attend to the matter. Now, when it has been two years since a proletariat which is not as cultivated as the German proletariat, the Russian working class, showed what means are required for the conquest of power, and upon what basis this power is subsequently organized, then all the Kautskyists come and implore the German people, for the love of God, not to imitate the "cruelties" unleashed by the destruction of the bourgeoisie as a class in Russia.

The German proletariat had grown accustomed to following its leaders; the whole world only appeared to it as a prison courtyard, and no one was more surprised by the successfully concluded German revolution than the German proletarians themselves. Had this not been the case, if their capacity to speak and to think had not been so astoundingly lost, then at that moment, at least, they would have asked what had to be done to defend the power they had conquered. This question would have been the question concerning the essence of the State.

Lassalle, who lived during an era when *bonzes* did not yet exist in the German workers movement, solved this problem. "The State", he says, "is the concentration of all real means of power existing in a people." The concentration of machine guns and the press, the rule over the banks, the rule over the means of production, the concentration of all military and economic organizations, this is the State. And what is decisive for the rule of the State is the question of which class among its entire people possesses the strongest means of power.

The power of the High Command's generals consisted in their control over the whole ensemble of great masses of arms and men. When this circumstance changed, when the workers and soldiers took all the means of power into their hands, and the other classes amounted to nothing, then all that had to be done was to organize this power and to add to it the rule over the press and the proletarian state would have come into existence. The institutions of this proletarian state developed quite spontaneously among the masses in the days of the revolution. The military organizations were in ruins, the police and the courts, as well as the administrative bureaucracy of the state, were paralyzed. To prevent chaos, and to organize economic relations, the workers and soldiers councils were organized throughout Germany, as if by a natural process, which in the first days of the revolution had concentrated all power into their hands. The union of all the German workers

and soldiers councils and their solid foundation in the masses of working people, in the mines, in the factories, in the countryside – this organization was the State. Within the framework of this organization the proletarians who possessed arms would have created a military organization: the Red Army. It did not occur to the proletarians that it was necessary to immediately firmly safeguard their power and to reorganize it. Whenever they thought in terms of organizations, they had in mind the concepts of their old organizations, the social democratic parties and the trade unions, which were born in the class state, and had matured within it, and which had neither the will nor the ability to safeguard proletarian power, to organize the proletariat as a State; not only had these parties and trade unions been integrated into the bourgeois class State, they had also become an essential part of it, and when all the organizations of the bourgeois State trembled when everything collapsed, they did not tremble, they became the backbone of the reborn bourgeois State. This is how the proletariat of Germany was defeated by the German proletarians, who had, by means of their parties, their trade unions, and their leaders, allowed the old German Empire, with its “Reichstag” which had just been tossed into the gutter, to return in the guise of the national assembly. This is how the commanding heights of the party and the trade unions became the commanding heights of this State. And this is how, in the state which had been reconstructed in this manner, the proletarians were disarmed, and the white guards were armed.

That such a misfortune should have befallen the proletariat is due in part to the fact that it was by no means prepared to carry out a revolution. But besides this circumstance there is another one which is very important. The proletariat had been accustomed to view the revolution as essentially a political change, and thought that, once this political change had taken place, the other change would only be a question of time, and that when the old political forms are destroyed, there would be an evolution towards a socialist society, and that the proletarian struggle would no longer be necessary. And, once again, it was the social democratic party and the trade unions which nourished this belief within the proletariat, and which had forgotten, or wanted to forget, to explain to the proletariat that the proletarian revolution is not exhausted in bringing about changes in political forms, but is essentially an economic revolution, a revolution whose task is to basically revolutionize the whole economy. If the political revolution was carried out by means of the uprising in the streets, the same cannot be true of the economic revolution, which cannot be accomplished by means of armed actions, but must take place where the economic process has its roots – in the factories. When it is a matter of providing a country’s economy with a completely new economic foundation, one must go to the roots of the economy, so it is not enough to rectify some random surface phenomena of the existing economy. Its roots are in the factories, that is why the revolutionary economic struggle of the workers begins in the factories themselves. And if the revolutionary struggle of the proletarians begins and ends in the factories, and if the goal of this struggle is to put these factories at the service of the proletariat, then the only way to organize the proletariat for this struggle is on the basis of the factory organization.

The old trade unions were created during an era when the proletariat did not find itself in the midst of an economic revolution. Capitalism was still expanding, attaining higher forms, and Germany was still undergoing industrial-capitalist ascent. In those days, when the trade unions began to unite the proletariat within the entire people, capitalism was still split into factions. Many businesses still competed with one another. At that time it was not a question of destroying the bourgeoisie as a class, because it was still in the process of forming itself as a class. Then, it was only a question of obtaining better wages and working conditions for certain layers of the working class. And at that time, the old trade union form did correspond to the needs of the proletarians. Skilled workers were still predominant in large sectors of the working masses, and there were still small

and medium-sized enterprises everywhere, with only occasional large businesses. The trade unions organized the workers by trade, and made the worker's neighborhood, rather than his factory, the basis of his trade union membership. All the questions of the trade union struggle were handled by trade union officials or at membership meetings, and were by no means decided where the workers find themselves day and night: in the factories.

Even before the war, this form of organization rendered the workers incapable of putting their forces to the test against capitalism in mass strikes. Because the old trade unions had fragmented the masses into groups defined by trade, they did not have the mass strike in their programs. As a result, the great shipyard workers strike of 1913 was defeated, because the workers' form of organization was not suited to the needs of a mass organization. The old trade unions were organizations of leaders who carried out the bulk of trade union activity; it was the leaders, not the masses, who negotiated. The leaders did not want the masses themselves to carry out actions. For these leaders, the strike was a last resort to be utilized in emergencies, rather than the natural weapon which the strike constitutes in a revolutionary period. In a revolutionary period it is no longer only a matter of improving working conditions, because capitalism is dying, capitalist society can no longer improve working conditions: now it is a question of destroying capitalist society. This can only be done by means of a continuous series of revolutionary mass strikes which, constantly spreading and successively embracing all industries, will shake the economy of the whole country to its very foundations and finally compel the capitalist class to declare bankruptcy. It is bankrupt now, but does it abandon all attempts to stage a recovery, or does it confess its incompetence? No, the capitalist class does no such thing; it cannot do that, that would mean suicide. This will only happen when the proletariat compels the capitalist class to do it. The principle means to achieve this goal is the revolutionary strike.

This strike, which can break out because of simple economic demands, possesses a political dimension because it affects the masses in such a manner as to threaten the existence of the whole economy by spreading to other sectors of the economy. This has been clearly demonstrated by the miners strike. Due to a shortage of coal, railroad operations were curtailed and the transport of commodities was paralyzed. Whether or not the miners were aware of this, the fact that they joined the strike as one great mass itself has had political effects. And this is the second reason why the old trade unions are incapable of leading the struggle of the working class during revolutionary times. The trade unions are prepared for partial economic struggles; the old social democratic party is prepared for political-parliamentary struggles. A struggle which is revolutionary, and simultaneously economic and political, can only be carried out by the masses themselves. This is only possible within organizations which are created for the purpose of conducting such struggles. Where these struggles have broken out, where the workers have plainly seen the incompetence of the old trade unions is where this new form has now become a reality. The miners organized by mines, and among the mines by regions, and all the districts together into a *Union* which includes all the workers in the industry. Since the miners have discovered this new form, the shipyard workers have now also finally begun to discuss this new form of organization. In the shipyards they, too, are joining workplace organizations, in order to then unite these workplace organizations in a single *Union* of Shipyard Workers. There is also the *Deutscher Seemannsbund* (Seaman's Organization) and an industry-wide organization of the German railroad workers is being debated throughout the country. The German railroad workers have only just recently been pushed into the free trade unions, and they have already begun to create a new revolutionary trade union based on workplace organizations. In Halle as in Berlin and Hamburg, they have independently elaborated the organizational forms which they intend to combine into a unitary organization, based on workplace organizations. These

preparatory labors are quite advanced, and if not this lost strike, then the next defeat will compel the railroad workers to turn their backs on the old trade union, and to find an organizational form which makes it possible for them to develop freely within the struggle without the restraints imposed by the trade union's centralized bureaucracy, which is so intimately intertwined with the state, and which in fact defends the interests of German state power. There is also a *Bargemen's Union* in Upper Silesia, and I have been informed that efforts are now taking place in Hamburg to unite the barge and river transport workers into a unitary organization.

There is still a great deal of hesitation; many workers still feel a certain fondness for their trade unions due to old habits. But revolutionary times demand revolutionary decisions, and whoever makes sentimentality the basis of their activity can win three political revolutions but then lose them because of the lack of an economic organization, just as the German proletariat has come to lose almost everything it gained after the first German revolution. The German proletariat, which is ready to conquer state power so as to organize a socialist economy, cannot do so unless it has first organized itself for this economy. If socialism is to be more than merely a bureaucratic scheme in which, instead of local employers, a centralized bureaucracy directs the economic process, and rules the working masses, as is now being attempted, then the proletariat must organize against the centralized bureaucracy in order to become a pillar of the productive process. This is the difference, and this is why the trade unions hate the factory organizations.

A trust, which is a kind of North American corporate entity, can dissolve itself today, and reorganize itself in a new form tomorrow. This is a completely natural process for it when it encounters obstacles which impede its operations. The trade unions, however, cannot dissolve themselves after a revolution in order to reorganize on a new basis. They have to preserve their old centralization, their old bureaucracy, and do so in order to organize the white guards to make factory organizations impossible even before they arise. This is how things stand now. Today, when the workers are well enough organized to begin the process of transformation, where they have a sensible leadership, the trade union bureaucracy joins the white guards to fight against those who want to form revolutionary trade unions. If a trade union were to be dissolved, and the next day, the workers were to begin signing up for the new form of organization, what would such an event signify? It would signify that the masses would have an organizational form in which they could freely develop all of their forces. For the leaders of the trade unions, however, it would mean they would no longer be needed, and this is why the bureaucracy will not agree to such a thing, and are merciless with the factory organizations.

As everyone knows, we have the enterprise councils, which will be institutionalized in the recently-created bourgeois class State. This State will give the councils a few rights, and more duties. Their principle duty will consist of endeavoring, together with the employers, to increase each enterprise's productivity. This cannot be the task of the revolutionary factory councils. As long as the class State exists, the proletariat is at war, and the factory councils must be organs of the revolutionary struggle. They must unilaterally defend the interests of the workers, even if this means that the enterprise goes bankrupt ten times, since, in this economic order, it is not interested in assuring profitability. The proletariat today has no interest at all in the recovery of the capitalist economy, but in its collapse. Each step towards recovery is a step backwards for the proletariat. Each increase in the profitability of any enterprise only fixes the chain more firmly which has once again bound the hands of the proletariat after the political revolution. But if the factory councils are not to be institutions dedicated to preserving capitalist exploitation, but rather institutions of the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat, then they must not be controlled by the counterrevolutionary trade unions, which are institutions of the class State, but, instead, by

the workers in the factories. The workers should not consent to any interference whatsoever in the running of these enterprise councils, especially by the trade unions. For this reason, as well, the proletariat needs factory organizations. Only if all the proletarians in an enterprise are united in a factory organization would they be capable of controlling everything that happens in the workplace. As long as this organizational form does not exist, the proletarians will be dispersed. Therefore, if you want to put an end to this dispersion into trade unions and parties, this can only be achieved if a new form of unity is created, a form of unity in which all the workers, whatever their trade, or their party, can together coordinate the affairs of the enterprise. This would only be possible in a factory organization. If the workers in a factory have to work together, regardless of which political tendencies they endorse, they could also carry out negotiations with each other and manage their own affairs within the factory.

The only condition for membership which the factory organization will have to establish, besides getting out of the trade unions, is that each member must defend the principle of the proletarian class struggle, and that he share the conviction that there can be no peace between the employers and the proletarians as long as the class State exists. A declaration to that effect is completely sufficient. This will keep out all those elements which used to be called "yellow", and unite all the revolutionary workers, even if their political positions diverge on some points (which is of no account for activity within the factory), in a unitary struggle against the employer, and against the employers as a class.

It is not by chance that it is just now, in Germany, where the political revolution has given way to the economic revolution, that this form of organization is beginning to prevail. In other countries, where police powers are more limited, and where capitalist democracy, such as we now have in Germany, already existed, the workers have long been organized in accordance with these perspectives. In North America, the "Industrial Workers of the World" discovered this form of organization many years ago, and has been applying methods which seem new to us here in Germany. Just as the "Industrial Workers of the World" began to win the masses over to its principles at the moment that it became clear that social contradictions had become so exacerbated that there could no longer be any concessions in the struggle against the trusts, and that the capitalist economy had to be destroyed, so here in Germany, the idea of the "*Allgemeine Arbeiterunion*" (General Workers Union) began to spread at the moment when the proletarians of Germany understood that being revolutionary involves more than just making or listening to revolutionary speeches, that revolutionary ideas must be transformed into revolutionary action, and that without revolutionary action the economic revolution cannot be completed even if the economic conditions are ripe for such a transformation. Today this implies that the proletarians must be convinced that they have to break with the old trade union forms, which did good work in the past, but which today comprise a counterrevolutionary element, and that it is of the utmost importance to concentrate all their forces in revolutionary organizations which can engage in the revolutionary struggle, and which will later be capable of taking control of industry. Who should control industry? Should it be the trade union offices, or do the workers want to control it themselves? If the workers want to control industry, they have to create an organizational form capable of making them masters of production. This form is the council regime, and the basic unit of the council regime is the factory council: but the factory council can play this role only if it is rooted in the factory organization. If not, it would be a falsification of the idea of the council. It would not, in such a case, be an instrument of the revolutionary struggle, but a deceit to confuse the proletarians about what methods to choose for that struggle.

Whoever has a firm determination to assure that power remains in the hands of the proletariat,

must also be sure of the road to follow. Whoever wants the political struggle to end in the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the economic struggle to result in the transfer of production into the hands of the proletariat, can only have one slogan:

*Get out of the trade unions,
Create factory organizations!*

7.4 Amadeo Bordiga, Party and Class (1921)

The Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution approved by the Second Congress of the Communist International are genuinely and deeply rooted in the Marxist doctrine. These theses take the definition of the relations between party and class as a starting point and establish that the class party can include in its ranks only a part of the class itself, never the whole nor even perhaps the majority of it. This obvious truth would have been better emphasised if it had been pointed out that one cannot even speak of a class unless a minority of this class tending to organise itself into a political party has come into existence. What in fact is a social class according to our critical method? Can we possibly recognise it by the means of a purely objective external acknowledgement of the common economic and social conditions of a great number of individuals, and of their analogous positions in relationship to the productive process? That would not be enough. Our method does not amount to a mere description of the social structure as it exists at a given moment, nor does it merely draw an abstract line dividing all the individuals composing society into two groups, as is done in the scholastic classifications of the naturalists. The Marxist critique sees human society in its movement, in its development in time; it utilises a fundamentally historical and dialectical criterion, that is to say, it studies the connection of events in their reciprocal interaction. Instead of taking a snapshot of society at a given moment (like the old metaphysical method) and then studying it in order to distinguish the different categories into which the individuals composing it must be classified, the dialectical method sees history as a film unrolling its successive scenes; the class must be looked for and distinguished in the striking features of this movement. In using the first method we would be the target of a thousand objections from pure statisticians and demographers (short-sighted people if there ever were) who would re-examine our divisions and remark that there are not two classes, nor even three or four, but that there can be ten, a hundred or even a thousand classes separated by successive gradations and indefinable transition zones. With the second method, though, we make use of quite different criteria in order to distinguish that protagonist of historical tragedy, the class, and in order to define its characteristics, its actions and its objectives, which become concretised into obviously uniform features among a multitude of changing facts; meanwhile the poor photographer of statistics only records these as a cold series of lifeless data. Therefore, in order to state that a class exists and acts at a given moment in history, it will not be enough to know, for instance, how many merchants there were in Paris under Louis XIV, or the number of English landlords in the Eighteenth Century, or the number of workers in the Belgian manufacturing industry at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. Instead, we will have to submit an entire historical period to our logical investigations; we will have to make out a social, and therefore political, movement which searches for its way through the ups and downs, the errors and successes, all the while obviously adhering to the set of interests of a strata of people who have been placed in a particular situation by the mode of production and by its developments. It is this method of analysis that Frederick Engels used in one of his first classical essays, where he drew the explanation of a series of political movements from the history of the English working class, and thus demonstrated the existence of a class struggle. This dialectical

concept of the class allows us to overcome the statistician's pale objections. He does not have the right any longer to view the opposed classes as being clearly divided on the scene of history as are the different choral groups on a theatre scene. He cannot refute our conclusions by arguing that in the contact zone there are undefinable strata through which an osmosis of individuals takes place, because this fact does not alter the historical physiognomy of the classes facing one another

Therefore the concept of class must not suggest to us a static image, but instead a dynamic one. When we detect a social tendency, or a movement oriented towards a given end, then we can recognise the existence of a class in the true sense of the word. But then the class party exists in a material if not yet in a formal way. A party lives when there is the existence of a doctrine and a method of action. A party is a school of political thought and consequently an organisation of struggle. The first characteristic is a fact of consciousness, the second is a fact of will, or more precisely of a striving towards a final end. Without those two characteristics, we do not yet have the definition of a class. As we have already said, he who coldly records facts may find affinities in the living conditions of more or less large strata, but no mark is engraved in history's development. It is only within the class party that we can find these two characteristics condensed and concretised. The class forms itself as certain conditions and relationships brought about by the consolidation of new systems of production are developed – for instance the establishment of big factories hiring and training a large labour force; in the same way, the interests of such a collectivity gradually begin to materialise into a more precise consciousness, which begins to take shape in small groups of this collectivity. When the mass is thrust into action, only these first groups can foresee a final end, and it is they who support and lead the rest. When referring to the modern proletarian class, we must conceive of this process not in relationship to a trade category but to the class as a whole. It can then be realised how a more precise consciousness of the identity of interests gradually makes its appearance; this consciousness, however, results from such a complexity of experiences and ideas, that it can be found only in limited groups composed of elements selected from every category. Indeed only an advanced minority can have the clear vision of a collective action which is directed towards general ends that concern the whole class and which has at its core the project of changing the whole social regime. Those groups, those minorities, are nothing other than the party. When its formation (which of course never proceeds without arrests, crises and internal conflicts) has reached a certain stage, then we may say that we have a class in action. Although the party includes only a part of the class, only it can give the class its unity of action and movement, for it amalgamates those elements, beyond the limits of categories and localities, which are sensitive to the class and represent it. This casts a light on the meaning of this basic fact: the party is only a part of the class. He who considers a static and abstract image of society, and sees the class as a zone with a small nucleus, the party, within it, might easily be led to the following conclusion: since the whole section of the class remaining outside the party is almost always the majority, it might have a greater weight and a greater right. However if it is only remembered that the individuals in that great remaining mass have neither class consciousness nor class will yet and live for their own selfish ends, or for their trade, their village, their nation, then it will be realised that in order to secure the action of the class as a whole in the historical movement, it is necessary to have an organ which inspires, unites and heads it – in short which officers it; it will then be realised that the party actually is the nucleus without which there would be no reason to consider the whole remaining mass as a mobilisation of forces. The class presupposes the party, because to exist and to act in history it must possess a critical doctrine of history and an aim to attain in it.

In the only true revolutionary conception, the direction of class action is delegated to the party. Doctrinal analysis, together with a number of historical experiences, allow us to easily reduce

to petty bourgeois and anti-revolutionary ideologies, any tendency to deny the necessity and the predominance of the party's function. If this denial is based on a democratic point of view, it must be subjected to the same criticism that Marxism uses to disprove the favourite theorems of bourgeois liberalism. It is sufficient to recall that, if the consciousness of human beings is the result, not the cause of the characteristics of the surroundings in which they are compelled to live and act, then never as a rule will the exploited, the starved and the underfed be able to convince themselves of the necessity of overthrowing the well-fed satiated exploiter laden with every resource and capacity. This can only be the exception. Bourgeois electoral democracy seeks the consultation of the masses, for it knows that the response of the majority will always be favourable to the privileged class and will readily delegate to that class the right to govern and to perpetuate exploitation. It is not the addition or subtraction of the small minority of bourgeois voters that will alter the relationship. The bourgeoisie governs with the majority, not only of all the citizens, but also of the workers taken alone. Therefore if the party called on the whole proletarian mass to judge the actions and initiatives of which the party alone has the responsibility, it would tie itself to a verdict that would almost certainly be favourable to the bourgeoisie. That verdict would always be less enlightened, less advanced, less revolutionary, and above all less dictated by a consciousness of the really collective interest of the workers and of the final result of the revolutionary struggle, than the advice coming from the ranks of the organised party alone. The concept of the proletariat's right to command its own class action is only an abstraction devoid of any Marxist sense. It conceals a desire to lead the revolutionary party to enlarge itself by including less mature strata, since as this progressively occurs, the resulting decisions get nearer and nearer to the bourgeois and conservative conceptions. If we looked for evidence not only through theoretical enquiry, but also in the experiences history has given us, our harvest would be abundant. Let us remember that it is a typical bourgeois cliché to oppose the good "common sense" of the masses to the "evil" of a "minority of agitators", and to pretend to be most favourably disposed towards the exploited's interests. The right-wing currents of the workers' movement, the social-democratic school, whose reactionary tenets have been clearly shown by history, constantly oppose the masses to the party and pretend to be able to find the will of the class by consulting on a scale wider than the limited bounds of the party. When they cannot extend the party beyond all limits of doctrine and discipline in action, they try to establish that its main organs must not be those appointed by a limited number of militant members, but must be those which have been appointed for parliamentary duties by a larger body – actually, parliamentary groups always belong to the extreme right wing of the parties from which they come. The degeneration of the social-democratic parties of the Second International and the fact that they apparently became less revolutionary than the unorganised masses, are due to the fact that they gradually lost their specific party character precisely through workerist and "labourist" practices. That is, they no longer acted as the vanguard preceding the class but as its mechanical expression in an electoral and corporative system, where equal importance and influence is given to the strata that are the least conscious and the most dependent on egotistical claims of the proletarian class itself. As a reaction to this epidemic, even before the war, there developed a tendency, particularly in Italy, advocating internal party discipline, rejecting new recruits who were not yet welded to our revolutionary doctrine, opposing the autonomy of parliamentary groups and local organs, and recommending that the party should be purged of its false elements. This method has proved to be the real antidote for reformism, and forms the basis of the doctrine and practice of the Third International, which puts primary importance on the role of the party – that is a centralised, disciplined party with a clear orientation on the problems of principles and tactics. The same Third International judged that the "collapse of the socialdemocratic parties of the Second International

was by no means the collapse of proletarian parties in general” but, if we may say so, the failure of organisms that had forgotten they were parties because they had stopped being parties.

There is also a different category of objection to the communist concept of the party’s role. These objections are linked to another form of critical and tactical reaction to the reformist degeneracy: they belong to the syndicalist school, which sees the class in the economic trade unions and pretends that these are the organs capable of leading the class in revolution. Following the classical period of the French, Italian and American syndicalism, these apparently left-wing objections found new formulations in tendencies which are on the margins of the Third International. These too can be easily reduced to semi-bourgeois ideologies by a critique of their principles as well as by acknowledging the historical results they led to. These tendencies would like to recognise the class within an organisation of its own – certainly a characteristic and a most important one – that is, the craft or trade unions which arise before the political party, gather much larger masses and therefore better correspond to the whole of the working class. From an abstract point of view, however, the choice of such a criterion reveals an unconscious respect for that selfsame democratic lie which the bourgeoisie relies on to secure its power by the means of inviting the majority of the people to choose their government. In other theoretical viewpoints, such a method meets with bourgeois conceptions when it entrusts the trade unions with the organisation of the new society and demands the autonomy and decentralisation of the productive functions, just as reactionary economists do. But our present purpose is not to draw out a complete critical analysis of the syndicalist doctrines. It is sufficient to remark, considering the result of historical experience, that the extreme right wing members of the proletarian movement have always advocated the same point of view, that is, the representation of the working class by trade unions; indeed they know that by doing so, they soften and diminish the movement’s character, for the simple reasons that we have already mentioned. Today the bourgeoisie itself shows a sympathy and an inclination, which are by no means illogical, towards the unionisation of the working class. Indeed, the more intelligent sections of the bourgeoisie would readily accept a reform of the state and representative apparatus in order to give a larger place to the “apolitical” unions and even to their claims to exercise control over the system of production. The bourgeoisie feels that, as long as the proletariat’s action can be limited to the immediate economic demands that are raised trade by trade, it helps to safeguard the status-quo and to avoid the formation of the perilous “political” consciousness – that is, the only consciousness which is revolutionary for it aims at the enemy’s vulnerable point, the possession of power. Past and present syndicalists, however, have always been conscious of the fact that most trade unions are controlled by right wing elements and that the dictatorship of the petty bourgeois leaders over the masses is based on the union bureaucracy even more than on the electoral mechanism of the social-democratic pseudo-parties. Therefore the syndicalists, along with very numerous elements who were merely acting in reaction to the reformist practice, devoted themselves to the study of new forms of union organisation and created new unions independent from the traditional ones. Such an expedient was theoretically wrong for it did not go beyond the fundamental criterion of the economic organisation: that is, the automatic admission of all those who are placed in given conditions by the part they play in production, without demanding special political convictions or special pledges of actions which may require even the sacrifice of their lives. Moreover, in looking for the “producer” it could not go beyond the limits of the “trade”, whereas the class party, by considering the “proletarian” in the vast range of his conditions and activities, is alone able to awaken the revolutionary spirit of the class. Therefore, that remedy which was wrong theoretically also proved inefficient in actuality. In spite of everything, such recipes are constantly being sought for even today. A totally wrong interpretation of Marxist determinism and a limited conception of

the part played by facts of consciousness and will in the formation, under the original influence of economic factors, of the revolutionary forces, lead a great number of people to look for a “mechanical” system of organisation that would almost automatically organise the masses according to each individual’s part in production. According to these illusions, such a device by itself would be enough to make the mass ready to move towards revolution with the maximum revolutionary efficiency. Thus the illusory solution reappears, which consists of thinking that the everyday satisfaction of economic needs can be reconciled with the final result of the overthrow of the social system by relying on an organisational form to solve the old antithesis between limited and gradual conquests and the maximum revolutionary program. But – as was rightly said in one of the resolutions of the majority of the German Communist Party at a time when these questions (which later provoked the secession of the KAPD) were particularly acute in Germany – revolution is not a question of the form of organisation. Revolution requires an organisation of active and positive forces united by a doctrine and a final aim. Important strata and innumerable individuals will remain outside this organisation even though they materially belong to the class in whose interest the revolution will triumph. But the class lives, struggles, progresses and wins thanks to the action of the forces it has engendered from its womb in the pains of history. The class originates from an immediate homogeneity of economic conditions which appear to us as the primary motive force of the tendency to destroy and go beyond the present mode of production. But in order to assume this great task, the class must have its own thought, its own critical method, its own will bent on the precise ends defined by research and criticism, and its own organisation of struggle channelling and utilising with the utmost efficiency its collective efforts and sacrifices. All this constitutes the Party.

7.5 Amadeo Bordiga, Towards the Establishment of Workers’ Councils in Italy (1920)

I

We have now collected quite a lot of material concerned with proposals and initiatives for establishing Soviets in Italy, and we reserve to ourselves the right to expound the elements of the argument step by step. At this stage we wish to make a few preliminary observations of a general nature, to which we have already referred in our most recent issues.

The system of proletarian representation that has been introduced for the first time ever in Russia has a twofold character: political and economic. Its political role is to struggle against the bourgeoisie until the latter has been totally eradicated. Its economic role is to create the whole novel mechanism of communist production. As the revolution unfolds and the parasitic classes are gradually eliminated, the political functions become less and less important in comparison with their economic counterparts: but in the first instance, *and above all when it is a question of struggling against bourgeois power*, political activity must come first.

The authentic instrument of the proletariat’s struggle for liberation, and above all of its conquest of political power, is the *communist class party*. Under the bourgeois regime, the communist party, the engine of the revolution, needs organs in which it can operate; these organs are the workers’ councils. To declare that they are the proletariat’s organs of liberation, without mentioning the role of the party, after the fashion of the programme adopted at the Congress of Bologna, seems mistaken in our view. To maintain, after the fashion of the Turin *L’Ordine Nuovo* comrades, that even before the collapse of the bourgeoisie the workers’ councils are organs, not only of political

struggle, but of technico-economic training in the communist system, can only be seen as a return to socialist gradualism. This latter, whether it is called reformism or syndicalism, is defined by the mistaken belief that the proletariat can achieve emancipation by making advances in economic relations while capitalism still holds political power through the State.

We shall now expand on the criticism of the two concepts we have mentioned.

The system of proletarian representation must be rooted in the whole of the technical process of production. This is a perfectly valid principle, but it corresponds to the stage when the proletariat is organizing the new economy after its seizure of power. Apply it without modification to the bourgeois regime, and you accomplish nothing in revolutionary terms. Even at the stage which Russia has reached, Soviet-type political representation – i.e. the ladder that culminates in the government of the people's commissars – does not start with work-crews or factory shops, but from the local administrative Soviet, elected directly by the workers (grouped if possible in their respective workplaces). To be specific, the Moscow Soviet is elected by the Moscow proletariat in the ratio of one delegate to every 1,000 workers. Between the delegates and the electors there is no intermediary organ. This first level then leads to higher levels, to the Congress of Soviets, the executive committee, and finally the government of commissars.

The factory *council* plays its part in quite a different network, that of workers' *control* over production. Consequently the factory council, made up of one representative for every workshop, does not nominate the factory's representative in the local political-administrative Soviet: this representative is elected directly and independently. In Russia, the factory councils are the basic unit of another system of representation (itself subordinate of course to the political network of Soviets): the system of workers' control and the people's economy. Control *within the factory* has a revolutionary and expropriative significance only after central power has passed into the hands of the proletariat. While the factory is still protected by the bourgeois State, the factory council controls nothing. The few functions it fulfils are the result of the traditional practice of: 1. parliamentary reformism; 2. trade-union resistance, which does not cease to be a reformist way of advancing.

To conclude: we do not oppose the setting up of internal factory councils if the workers themselves or their organizations demand them. But we insist that the communist party's activity must be based on another terrain, namely the struggle for the conquest of political power. This struggle may well be advanced fruitfully by the setting up of workers' representative bodies – but these must be urban or rural workers' councils elected directly by the masses, waiting to take the place of municipal councils and local organs of State power at the moment the bourgeois forces collapse. Having thus advanced our thesis, we promise to give it ample documentation and factual support, and to present our work in a report to the next meeting of the communist fraction.

II

Prior to getting down to discussing the practical problems of setting up workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils in Italy, and bearing in mind the general considerations contained in the article we published in our last issue, we wish to examine the programmatic guidelines or the Soviet system as they are developed in the documents of the Russian revolution and in the declarations of principle issued by some or the Italian maximalist currents, such as the programme adopted by the Bologna Congress, the motion proposed by Leone and other comrades to the same congress; and the writings of *L'Ordine Nuovo* on the Turin factory council movement.

The Councils and the Bolshevik Programme

In the documents of the IIIrd International and the Russian Communist Party, in the masterly reports of those formidable exponents of doctrine, the leaders of the Russian revolutionary movement – Lenin, Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin – there recurs at frequent intervals the idea that the Russian revolution did not *invent* new and unforeseen structures, but merely confirmed the predictions of Marxist theory concerning the revolutionary process.

The core of the imposing phenomenon of the Russian revolution is the conquest of political power on the part of the working masses, and the establishment of their dictatorship, as the result of an authentic class war.

The Soviets – and it is well to recall that the word *soviet* simply means *council*, and can be employed to describe any sort of representative body – the Soviets, as far as history is concerned, are the system of representation employed by the proletarian class once it has taken power. The Soviets are the organs that take the place of parliament and the bourgeois administrative assemblies and gradually replace all the other ramifications of the State. To put it in the words of the most recent congress of the Russian communists, as quoted by Comrade Zinoviev, “the Soviets are the State organizations of the workers and poor peasants; they exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat during the stage when all previous forms of the State are being extinguished.”

In the final analysis, this system of State organizations gives representation to all producers in their capacity as members of the working class, and not as members of a particular trade or industrial sector. According to the latest manifesto of the Third International, the Soviets represent “a new type of mass organization, one which embraces the working class in its entirety, irrespective of individual trades or levels of political maturity”. The basic units of the Soviet administrative network are the urban and rural councils; the network culminates in the government of commissars.

And yet it is true that during the phase of economic transformation, other organs are emerging parallel to this system, such as the system of workers’ control and the people’s economy. It is also true, as we have stressed many times, that this economic system will gradually absorb the political system, once the expropriation of the bourgeoisie is completed and there is no further need for a central authority. But the essential problem during the revolutionary period, as emerges clearly from all the Russian documents, is that of keeping the various local and sectional demands and interests subordinate to the general interest (in space and time) of the revolutionary movement.

Not until the two sets of organs are merged will the network of production be thoroughly communist, and only then will that principle (which in our view is being given exaggerated importance) of a perfect match between the system of representation and the mechanisms of the productive system be successfully realized. Prior to that stage, while the bourgeoisie is still resisting and above all while it still holds power, the problem is to achieve a representative system in which the general interest prevails. Today, while the economy is still based on individualism and competition, the only form in which this higher collective interest can be manifested is a system of *political* representation in which the communist political party is active.

We shall come back to this question, and demonstrate how the desire to over-concretize and technically determine the Soviet system, especially when the bourgeoisie is still in power, puts the cart before the horse and lapses into the old errors of syndicalism and reformism. For the moment we quote these non-ambiguous words of Zinoviev: “The communist party unifies that vanguard of the proletariat which is struggling, in conscious fashion, to put the communist programme into effect. In particular it is striving to introduce its programme into the State organizations, the Soviets, and to achieve complete dominance within them.

To conclude, the Russian Soviet Republic is led by the Soviets, which represent ten million

workers out of a total population of about eighty million. But essentially, appointments to the executive committees of the local and central Soviets are settled in the sections and congresses of the great Communist Party which has mastery over the Soviets. This corresponds to the stirring defence by Radek of the revolutionary role of minorities. It would be as well not to create a majoritarian-workerist fetishism which could only be to the advantage of reformism and the bourgeoisie. The party is in the front line of the revolution in so far as it is potentially composed of men who think and act like members of the future working humanity in which all will be producers harmoniously inserted into a marvellous mechanism of functions and representation.

...

III

At the end of our second article on the establishment of Soviets in Italy, we referred to the Turin movement to establish factory councils. We do not share the point of view which inspires the efforts of the *L'Ordine Nuovo* comrades, and while appreciating their tenacity in making the fundamentals of communism better known, we believe that they have committed major errors of principle and tactics.

According to them, the essence of the communist revolution lies in the setting up of new organs of proletarian representation, whose fundamental character is their strict alignment with the process of production; eventually these organs are to control production directly. We have already made the point that we see this as over-emphasis on the idea of a formal coincidence between the representative organs of the working class and the various aggregates of the technico-economic system of production. This coincidence will in fact be achieved at a much more advanced stage of the communist revolution, when production is socialized and all its various constituent activities are subordinated in harmonious fashion to the general and collective interests.

Prior to this stage, and during the period of transition from a capitalist to a communist economy, the groupings of producers are in a constant state of flux and their individual interests may at times clash with the general and collective interests of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat. This movement will find its real instrument in a working-class representative institution in which each individual participates in his capacity as a member of the working class, and as such interested in a radical change in social relations, rather than as a component of a particular trade, factory or local group.

So long as political power remains in the hands of the capitalist class, a representative organ embodying the general revolutionary interests of the proletariat can only be found in the *political* arena. It can only be a class party that has the personal adherence of the sort of people who, in order to dedicate themselves to the cause of the revolution, have managed to overcome their narrow selfish, sectional and even sometimes class interests (the latter case obtaining when the party admits deserters from the bourgeois class into its ranks, provided they are supporters of the communist programme).

It is a serious error to believe that by importing the formal structures which one expects to be formed to manage communist production into the present proletarian environment, among the wage-earners of capitalism, one will bring into being forces which are in themselves and through inner necessity revolutionary. This was the error of the syndicalists, and this too is the error of the over-zealous supporters of the factory councils.

The article published by comrade C. Niccolini in *Comunismo* comes at an opportune moment. He notes that in Russia, even after the proletarian seizure of power, the factory councils frequently

placed obstacles in the path of revolutionary measures; to an even greater extent than the trade unions, they counterposed the pressures of narrow interests to the unfolding of the revolutionary process. Even within the network of the communist economy, the factory councils are not the principal determinants of the production process. In the organs which fulfil this function (Councils of the People's Economy), the factory councils have fewer representatives than the trade unions or the proletarian State authorities; it is this centralized political network that is the instrument and the dominant factor in the revolution – understood not only as a struggle against the political resistance of the bourgeois class, but also as a process of socializing wealth.

At the juncture we have reached in Italy, viz. the juncture where the proletarian State is still a programmatic aspiration, the fundamental problem is the conquest of power on the part of the proletariat, or better the communist proletariat – i.e. the workers who are organized into a class-based political party, who are determined to make the historical form of revolutionary power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, into a concrete reality.

...

In addition to this disagreement, there is another point which separates us from the Turin comrades. The Soviets, State organizations of the victorious proletariat, are not at all the same as the factory councils, nor do these latter constitute the first step or rung of the Soviet political system. This confusion is also present in the declaration of principles adopted by the first assembly of workshop delegates from the factories of Turin, which begins as follows:

The factory delegates are the sole and authentic social (economic and political) representatives of the proletarian class, by virtue of their being elected by all workers at their work-place on the basis of universal suffrage. At the various levels of their constitution, the delegates embody the union of all workers as realized in organs of production (work-crew, workshop, factory, union of the factories in a given industry, union of the productive enterprises in a city, union of the organs of production in the mechanical and agricultural industry of a district, a province, a region, the nation, the world) whose authority and social leadership are invested in the councils and council system.

This declaration is unacceptable, since proletarian power is formed directly within the municipal Soviets of town and country, without passing via factory councils and committees, as we have repeated many times; this fact also emerges from the lucid expositions of the Russian Soviet system published by *L'Ordine Nuovo* itself. The factory councils are organs whose task will be to represent the interests of groups of workers during the period of revolutionary transformation of production. They represent not only a particular group's determination to achieve liberation through socialization of the private capitalist's firm, but also the group's concern for the manner in which its interests will be taken into account during the process of socialization itself, a process disciplined by the organized will of the whole of the working collectivity.

The workers' interests have until now been represented by the trade unions, throughout the period when the capitalist system appeared stable and there was scope only for putting upward pressure on wages. The unions will continue to exist during the revolutionary period, and naturally enough there will be a demarcation dispute with the factory councils, which only emerge when the abolition of private capitalism is seen to be imminent, as has happened in Turin. However, it is not a matter of great revolutionary moment to decide whether non-union members should participate or no in the elections for delegates. If it is logical that they should in fact participate, given the very nature of the factory council, it certainly does not appear logical to us that there should be a mingling of organs and functions between councils and unions, along the lines of the Turin

proposals – compelling, for example, the Turin section of the Metalworkers' Federation to elect its own executive council from the workshop delegates' assembly.

At any rate, the relations between councils and unions as representatives of the special interests of particular groups of workers will continue to be very complex; they will be settled and harmonized only in a very advanced stage of the communist economy, when the possibility of the interests of a group of producers being at variance with the general interest in the progress of production will be reduced to a minimum.

What is important to establish is that the communist revolution will be led and conducted by an organ representing the working class *politically*; prior to the smashing of bourgeois power, this is a political party. Subsequently, it is the system of political Soviets elected directly by the masses, with the aim of choosing representatives who have a general political programme and are not merely the exponents of the narrow interests of a trade or firm.

The Russian system is so contrived that a town's municipal Soviet is composed of one delegate for every group of proletarians, who vote for a single name only. The delegates, however, are proposed to the electors by the political party; the same process is repeated for the second and third degrees of delegation, to the higher organs of the State system. Thus it is always a single political party – the Communist Party – which seeks and obtains from the electors a mandate to administer power. We are certainly not saying that the Russian system should be adopted in an uncritical fashion elsewhere, but we do feel that the principle underlying the revolutionary system of representation – viz. the subjection of selfish and sectional interests to the collective interest – should be adhered to even more closely than in Russia.

Would it usefully serve the communists' revolutionary struggle if the network of a political system of representation of the working class were instituted now? This is the problem we shall examine in the next article, when we discuss the relevant proposals elaborated by the Party leadership. We shall remain unshaken in our conviction that such a representative system would be quite different from the system of factory councils and committees that has begun to form in Turin (and indeed this is partially recognized in the Party's proposals).

IV

We believe we have already said enough concerning the difference between factory councils and politico-administrative councils of workers and peasants. The factory council represents workers' interests which extend no farther than the narrow circle of an industrial firm. Under a communist regime, it is the basic unit of the system of "workers' control" which has a certain part to play in the system of "Councils of the Economy", a system which will eventually take over the technical and economic management of production. But the factory council has nothing to do with the system of political Soviets, the depositories of proletarian power.

Under the bourgeois regime, therefore, the factory council, or for that matter the trade union, cannot be viewed as an organ for the conquest of political power. If, on the other hand, one were to view them as organs for the emancipation of the proletariat via a route that does not involve the revolutionary conquest of power, one would be lapsing into the syndicalist error: the comrades around *L'Ordine Nuovo* are hardly correct when they maintain, as they have done in polemic with *Guerra di Classe*, that the factory council movement, as they theorize it, is not in some sense a syndicalist movement.

Marxism is characterized by its prediction that the proletariat's Struggle for emancipation will be divided into a number of great historical phases, in which political activity and economic activity

vary enormously in importance: the struggle for power; the exercise of power (dictatorship of the proletariat) in the transformation of the economy; the society without classes and without a political State. To identify, in the role of the liberation organs of the proletariat, the stages of the political process with their economic counterparts is to lapse into the petty-bourgeois caricature of Marxism called economism (which in turn can be classified into reformism and syndicalism). Over-emphasis on the factory council is just a resurrection of this hoary old error, which unites the petty-bourgeois Proudhon with all those revisionists who believe they have transcended Marx.

Under a bourgeois regime, then, the factory council represents the interests of the workers in a particular enterprise, just as it will do under a communist regime. It arises when circumstances demand it, through changes in the methods of proletarian economic organization. But perhaps to an even greater extent than the trade union, the council opens its flank to the deviations of reformism.

The old minimalist tendency that argues in favour of compulsory arbitration and profit-sharing by workers (i.e. their participation in the management and administration of the factory) could well find in the factory council the basis for the drafting of an anti-revolutionary piece of social legislation. This is happening in Germany at the moment, where the Independents are opposing not the principle, but the manner of the draft legislation, in stark contrast to the Communists who maintain that the democratic regime cannot grant the proletariat any form of control whatsoever over capitalist functions. It should thus be clear that it makes no sense to speak of workers' *control* until political power rests in the hands of the proletarian State. Such control can only be exercised, as a prelude to the socialization of firms and their administration by appropriate organs of the collectivity, in the name of the proletarian State and on the basis of its power.

Councils of workers – industrial workers, peasants and, on occasion, soldiers – are, as is clear, the political organs of the proletariat, the foundations of the proletarian State. The urban and rural local councils take the place of the municipal councils under the bourgeois regime. The provincial and regional Soviets take the place of the present provincial councils, with this difference, that the provincial Soviets are not elected directly, but indirectly from the local Soviets. The State Congress of Soviets, together with the Central Executive Committee, take the place of the bourgeois parliament, with the difference again that they are not elected directly, but by third or even fourth degree suffrage.

There is no need here to emphasize the other differences, of which the most important is the electors' right of recall of any delegate at any time. If the mechanism to cope with these recalls is to be flexible, then the elections in the first place should not be based on lists of candidates, but should involve giving a single delegate to a grouping of electors who, if possible, should live and work together. But the fundamental characteristic of this whole system does not reside in these technicalities, which have nothing magical about them, but rather in the principle which lays down that the right to vote, both actively and passively, is reserved to the workers alone and denied to the bourgeois.

As far as the formation of municipal Soviets is concerned, two errors are commonly encountered. One is the idea that delegates to the Soviets are elected by factory councils and committees (executive commissions of the councils of workshop delegates), whereas in fact, as we make no apology for repeating, the delegates are elected directly by the mass of electors. This error is reproduced in the Bombacci proposal for establishing Soviets in Italy (Para. 6).

The other error consists in thinking that the Soviet is a body composed of representatives simply

nominated by the Socialist Party, the trade unions and the factory councils. Comrade Ambrosini, for example, makes this error in his proposals. Such a system might perhaps be useful in order to form Soviets quickly and on a provisional basis, but it does not correspond to their definitive structure. It is true that in Russia a small percentage of delegates to the Soviet are added to those elected directly by the proletarian electors. But in reality the Communist Party, or any other party, obtains its representation by standing tried and proven members of its organization as candidates, and by campaigning around its programme before the electorate. In our view, a Soviet can only be called revolutionary when a majority of its delegates are members of the Communist Party.

All of this, it should be understood, refers to the period of the proletarian dictatorship. Now we come to the vexed question: what should be the role and characteristics of the workers' councils while the power of the bourgeoisie is still intact?

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With this article we propose to conclude our exposition, though we may resume the discussion in polemic with comrades who have commented on our point of view in other newspapers. The discussion has now been taken up by the whole of the socialist press. The best articles we have come across are those by C. Niccolini in *Avanti!* These articles were written with great clarity and in line with genuine Marxist principles; we fully concur with them.

The Soviets, the councils of workers, peasants (and soldiers), are the form adopted by the representative system of the proletariat, in its exercise of power after the smashing of the capitalist State. Prior to the conquest of power, when the bourgeoisie is still politically dominant, it can happen that special historical conditions, probably corresponding to serious convulsions in the institutional arrangements of the State and society, bring Soviets into existence – and it can be very appropriate for communists to facilitate and stimulate the birth of these new organs of the proletariat. We must, however, be quite clear that their formation in this manner cannot be an artificial procedure, the mere application of a recipe – and that in any case the simple establishment of workers' councils, as *the form* of the proletarian revolution, does not imply that the problem of the revolution is resolved, nor that infallible conditions have been laid for its success. The revolution may not occur even when councils exist (we shall cite examples), if these are not infused with the political and historical consciousness of the proletariat – a consciousness which is condensed, one might almost say, in the communist political party.

The fundamental problem of the revolution thus lies in gauging the proletariat's determination to smash the bourgeois State and take power into its own hands. Such a determination on the part of the broad masses of the working class exists as a direct result of the economic relations of exploitation by capital; it is these which place the proletariat in an intolerable situation and drive it to smash the existing social forms. The task of the communists, then, is to direct this violent reaction on the part of the masses and give it greater efficiency. The communists – as the *Manifesto* said long ago – have a superior knowledge of the conditions of the class struggle and the proletariat's emancipation than the proletariat itself. The critique they make of history and of the constitution of society places them in a position to make fairly accurate predictions concerning the developments of the revolutionary process. It is for this reason that communists form the class's political party, which sets itself the task of unifying the proletarian forces and organizing the proletariat into the dominant class through the revolutionary conquest of power. When the revolution is imminent and its pre-conditions have matured in the real world, a powerful communist party must exist and its

consciousness of the events which lie ahead must be particularly acute.

As regards the revolutionary organs which will exercise proletarian power and represent the foundations of the revolutionary State on the morrow of the collapse of the bourgeoisie, their consciousness of their role will depend on the extent to which they are led by workers who are conscious of the need for a dictatorship of their own class – i.e. communist workers. Wherever this is not the case, these organs will concede the power they have won and the counter-revolution will triumph. Thus if at any given moment these organs are required and communists need to concern themselves with setting them up, it should not therefore be thought that in them we have a means of readily outflanking the bourgeoisie and almost automatically overcoming its resistance to the ceding of power.

Can the Soviets, the State organs of the victorious proletariat, play a role as organs of revolutionary struggle for the proletariat while capitalism still controls the State? The answer is yes – in the sense, however, that at any given stage they may constitute the right terrain for the revolutionary struggle that the Party is waging. And at that particular stage, the Party has to fashion such a terrain, such a grouping of forces, for itself.

Today, in Italy, have we reached this stage of struggle? We feel that we are very close to it, but that there is one more stage to go through. The communist party, which has to work within the Soviets, does not yet exist. We are not saying that the Soviets will wait for it before they emerge. It could happen that events occur differently. But then we will run this grave risk, that the immaturity of the party will allow these organs to fall into the hands of the reformists, the accomplices of the bourgeoisie, the saboteurs and falsifiers of the revolution. And so we feel that the problem of forging a genuine communist party in Italy is much more urgent than the problem of creating Soviets. To study both problems, and establish the optimal conditions in which to tackle both without delay – this too is acceptable, but without setting fixed and schematic dates for an almost official *inauguration* of Soviets in Italy.

To accomplish the formation of the genuine communist party means sorting out the communists from the reformists and social-democrats. Some comrades believe that the very proposal to set up Soviets would also facilitate this sorting out process. We do not agree – for the very reason that the Soviet, in our view, is not in its essence a revolutionary organ. In any case, if the rise of Soviets is to be the source of political clarification, we fail to see how this may be accomplished on the basis of an understanding – as in the Bombacci proposal – between reformists, maximalists, syndicalists and anarchists! On the contrary, the forging of a sound and healthy revolutionary movement in Italy will never be accomplished by advancing new organs modelled on future forms, like factory councils or soviets – just as it was an illusion to believe that the revolutionary spirit could be salvaged from reformism by importing it into the unions, seen as the nucleus of the future society.

We will not effect the sorting-out process through a new recipe, which will frighten no one, but by abandoning once and for all the old “recipes”, the pernicious and fatal methods of the past. For well-known reasons, we feel that if a method has to be abandoned, and expelled along with non-communists from our ranks, then it should be the electoral method – and we see no other route to the setting up of a communist party that is worthy to affiliate to Moscow.

Let us work towards this goal – beginning, as Niccolini puts it so well, with the elaboration of a consciousness, a political culture, in the *leaders*, through a more serious study of the problems of the revolution, with fewer distractions from spurious electoral, parliamentary and minimalist activities.

Let us work towards this goal. Let us issue more propaganda concerning the conquest of power, to build awareness of what the revolution will be, what its organs will be, how the Soviets will really function. Then we can say we have done truly valuable work towards establishing the councils of the

proletariat and winning within them the revolutionary dictatorship that will open up the radiant road to communism.

7.6 Antonio Gramsci, Unions and Councils (1919)

The proletarian organization which assembles, as the total expression of the worker and peasant mass, in the central offices of the *Confederazione del Lavoro*, is passing through a constitutional crisis similar in nature to the crisis in which the democratic parliamentary state vainly debates. The solution of one will be the solution of the other, since, resolving the problem of the will of power in the case of their class organization, the workers will arrive at the creation of the organic scaffolding of their state and they will counterpose it victoriously to the parliamentary state.

The workers feel that the complex of “their” organization has become such an enormous apparatus, which has ended in obeying its own laws, intimate to its structure and to its complicated functioning, but extraneous to the mass which has acquired a consciousness of its historical mission as a revolutionary class. They feel that their will for power is not expressed, in a clear and precise sense, through the current institutional hierarchies. They feel that even at home, in the home they have tenaciously constructed, with patient efforts cementing it with blood and tears, the machine crushes the man, bureaucracy sterilizes the creator spirit and banal and verbalistic diletterism attempt in vain to hide the absence of precise concepts on the necessities of industrial production and the lack of understanding of the psychology of the proletarian masses. The workers are irritated by these real conditions, but they are individually powerless to change them; the words and wills of individual men are too small a thing compared to the iron laws inherent in the structure of the union apparatus.

The leaders of the organization do not notice this deep and widespread crisis. The more it clearly appears that the working class is not organized in forms corresponding to its real historical structure, the more it happens that the working class is not lined up in a configuration which incessantly adapts itself to laws which govern the intimate process of real historical development of the class itself; the more these leaders persist in their blindness and force themselves to “juridically” settle dissent and conflicts. Eminently bureaucratic spirits, they believe that an objective condition, rooted in the psychology which is developed in the living experiences of the factory, can be overcome with a discourse which moves feelings, and with an order of the day unanimously voted in an assembly made ugly by hubbub and oratorical meanderings. Today they force themselves to “rise to the height of the times” and, as if to demonstrate that they are also capable of “hard thinking,” refashion the old and worn-out union ideologies, tediously insisting on relations of identity between the soviet and the union, tediously insisting on affirming that the present system of union organization constitutes the system of forces in which the dictatorship of the proletariat must be made flesh.

The union, in the form in which it presently exists in the countries of Western Europe, is a type of organization not only essentially different from the soviet, but different also, and in a notable way, from the union which is developing ever more in the red communist republic.

The trade unions, the *Camere del Lavoro*, the industrial federations, the *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro*, are the type of proletarian organization specific to the period of history dominated by capital. In a certain sense it can be maintained that it is an integral part of capitalist society, and it has a function which is inherent to the regime of private property. In this period, in which individuals have value in so far as they are owners of goods and trade in their property, workers have also had to obey the iron law of general necessity and have become merchants of their only property, labour power and professional intelligence. More exposed to the risks of competition, workers

have accumulated their property in ever more vast and comprehensive “firms,” they have created this enormous apparatus of concentration of flesh and graft, they have imposed prices and hours and they have disciplined the market. They have assumed from outside or they have generated from within a trusted administrative personnel, expert in this kind of speculation, up to the job of dominating the conditions of the market, capable of stipulating contracts, of assessing commercial vagaries, of initiating economically useful operations. The essential nature of the union is competitive, it is not communist. The union cannot be an instrument of radical renewal of society: it can offer the proletariat knowledgeable bureaucrats, technical experts in industrial questions of general character, it cannot be the base of proletarian power. It offers no possibility of choosing individual proletarians capable and worthy of leading society, it cannot generate hierarchies which embody the vital thrust, the rhythm of progress of communist society.

The proletarian dictatorship can be made flesh in a type of organization which is specific to the particular activity of producers and not of wage-earners, slaves of capital. The factory council is the first cell of this organization. Since in the council all the branches of labour are represented, proportionally to the contribution each trade and each branch of labour makes to the development of the object which the factory produces for the collective, the institution is of a class, it is social. Its reason for being is in labour, is in industrial production, in a thus permanent state and not only in a salary, in the division of classes, in a thus transitory state and which is precisely to be overcome.

Thus the council realizes the unity of the labouring class, gives the masses a cohesion and a form which are of the same nature as the cohesion and form as the mass assumes in the general organization of society.

The factory council is the model of the proletarian state. All the problems which are inherent in the organization of the proletarian state are inherent in the organization of the council. In one and the other the concept of citizen decays, and the concept of comrade grows: collaboration to produce well and usefully develops solidarity, multiplies the links of affection and fraternity. Everyone is indispensable, everyone is at their post, and everyone has a function and a post. Even the most ignorant and backward of workers, even the most vain and “cultured” of engineers end convincing themselves of this truth in the organization of the factory: all finish by acquiring a communist consciousness to understand the great step forward which the communist economy represents over the capitalist economy. The council is the most suited organ of reciprocal education and of development of the new social spirit which the proletariat has managed to develop from the living and fertile experience of the community of labour. Worker solidarity which in the union developed in the struggle against capitalism, in suffering and sacrifice, in the council is positive, is permanent, is made flesh even in the most negligible of moments of industrial production, is contained in the glorious consciousness of being an organic whole, a homogeneous and compact system which working usefully, which disinterestedly producing social wealth, affirms its sovereignty, actuates its power and freedom to create history.

The existence of an organization, in which the labouring class is lined up in its homogeneity of a producing class, and which makes possible a spontaneous and free flowering of fitting and capable hierarchies and individuals, will have important and fundamental effects on the constitution and spirit which enliven activity of unions.

The factory council is also founded on trades. In each section the workers are separated by team and each team is a unit of labour (trade): the council is constituted precisely of commissars which the workers elect by section trade (team). But the union is based on the individual, the council is based on the organic and concrete unity of the trades which is developed in the discipline of the

industrial process. The team (trade) feels distinct in the homogeneous body of the class, but in the same moment it feels engaged in the system of discipline and order which makes possible, with its exact and precise functioning, the development of production. As an economic and political interest the trade is united in solidarity with the body of the class; it is differentiated from it as a technical interest and as the development of the particular instrument which it adopts for labour. In the same way, all industries are homogeneous and solidaristic in the aim of realizing perfect production, distribution and social accumulation of wealth; but each industry has distinct interests regarding the technical organization of its specific activity.

The existence of the council gives workers the direct responsibility of production, it draws them to improving the work, instils a conscious and voluntary discipline, creates the psychology of the producer, of the creator of history. The workers bring into the union this new consciousness and from the simple activity of class struggle, the union dedicates itself to the fundamental work of impressing a new configuration upon economic life and the technique of labour, it dedicates itself to elaborating the form of economic life and professional technique which is proper to communist culture. In this sense the unions, which are constituted of the best and most conscious workers, actuate the supreme moment of the class struggle and of the dictatorship of the proletariat: they create the objective conditions in which classes can no longer exist nor be reborn.

In Russia, this is what the industrial unions do. They have become the organisms in which all the individual enterprises of a certain industry amalgamate, connect, act, forming a great industrial unity. Wasteful competition is eliminated, the great services of administration, of resupply, of distribution and of accumulation, are unified in large centres. The systems of work, the secrets of fabrication, the new applications immediately become common to the whole industry. The multiplicity of bureaucratic and disciplinary functions inherent to relations of private property and individual enterprise, is reduced to pure industrial necessities. The application of union principles to the textile industry has allowed in Russia a reduction of the bureaucracy from 100,000 employees to 3,500.

The organization by factory makes up the class (the whole class) in a homogeneous unit and which adheres plastically to the industrial process of production and dominates it to take ownership definitively. In the organization by factory is thus made flesh the proletarian dictatorship, the communist state which destroys the dominion of class in the political superstructures and in its general mechanisms.

The trade and industry unions are the solid vertebrae of the great proletarian body. They elaborate individual and local experiences, and they gather them, actuating that national equalizing of conditions of labour and of production on which is concretely based communist equality.

But because it is impossible to impress on the unions this positively class and communist direction it is necessary that the workers turn all their will and their faith to the consolidation and the diffusion of the councils, to the organic unification of the labouring class. On this homogeneous and solid foundation will flower and develop all the superior structures of the communist dictatorship and economy.

7.7 Antonio Gramsci, Unions and the Dictatorship (1919)

The international class struggle has culminated in the victory of the workers and peasants of two international proletariats. In Russia and in Hungary the workers and peasants have established the proletarian dictatorship and in Russia as much as in Hungary the dictatorship had to sustain a bitter battle not only against the bourgeois class, but also against the unions: the conflict between

the dictatorship and the unions was thus one of the causes of the fall of the Hungarian soviet, since the unions, though they never openly attempted to overthrow the dictatorship, operated always as “splitting” organisms of the revolution and incessantly planted discontent and cowardice amongst the workers and the red soldiers. Even a rapid examination, of the reasons and the conditions of this conflict cannot fail to be useful in the revolutionary education of the masses, the which, if they must be convinced that the union is perhaps the most important proletarian organism of the communist revolution, because on it must be founded the socialization of industry, because it must create the conditions in which private enterprise disappears and cannot be reborn, must also be convinced of the necessity of creating, before the revolution, the psychological and objective conditions under which will be impossible every conflict and every division of power between the various organisms in which the struggle of the proletarian class against capitalism is embodied.

The class struggle has assumed in all the countries of Europe and of the world a strictly revolutionary character. The conception, which is due to the Third International, according to which the class struggle must be directed towards the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, has the upper hand over the democratic ideology and spreads irresistibly amongst the masses. The socialist parties adhere to the Third International or at least they adhere to the fundamental principles developed at the Moscow Congress; the unions on the other hand have remained faithful to “true democracy” and miss no occasion to induce or oblige the workers to declare themselves adversaries of the dictatorship and to refuse demonstrations of solidarity with the Russia of the soviets. This stance of the unions was rapidly overcome in Russia, since the development of the organizations of trade and industry was accompanied in parallel and with a more accelerated rhythm by the development of factory councils; it has instead eroded the base of proletarian power in Hungary, has caused in Germany great slaughters of communist workers and the birth of the Noske phenomenon, has caused in France the failure of the general strike of 20-21 July and the consolidation of the Clemenceau regime, has blocked until now every direct intervention of the English workers in the political struggle and threatens to sunder deeply and dangerously the proletarian forces in every country.

The socialist parties are acquiring ever more a definitely revolutionary and internationalist profile; the unions tend on the other hand to embody the theory (!) and the tactic of reformist opportunism and to become merely national organisms. From them is born an unsustainable state of affairs, a condition of permanent confusion and of chronic weakness for the working class, which increases the general imbalance of society and favours the sprouting of ferments of moral breakdown and of barbarization. The unions have organized workers according to principles of class struggle and have themselves been the first organic forms of this struggle. The organizers have always said that only the class struggle can bring the proletariat to its emancipation and that union organization has precisely the aim of suppressing individual profit and the exploitation of man by man, since it is proposed to eliminate the capitalist (the private proprietor) from the industrial process of production and to thus eliminate classes. But the unions cannot immediately bring about this aim and so they turn all their strength to the immediate aim of bettering the conditions of life of the proletariat, demanding higher salaries, reduced working hours, a body of social legislation. Movements followed movements, strikes, and the condition of life of the workers became relatively better. But all the results, all the victories of union action are set on the old basis: the principle of private property remains intact and strong, the order of capitalist production and the exploitation of man by man remain intact and thus are complicated in new forms. The eight hour day, the pay rise, the benefits of social legislation do not touch profit; the imbalances which union action immediately brings about in the test of profit recombine themselves and find a new accommodation

in the play of free competition for the nations in the world economy such as England and Germany, in protectionism for the nations with a limited economy such as France and Italy. Capitalism, that is, directs to the amorphous national masses or to the colonial masses the increased general costs of industrial production.

Union action thus shows itself incapable of overcoming in its domain and with its means, capitalist society, shows itself incapable of leading the proletariat to its emancipation, of leading the proletariat to the achievement of the high and universal end which it had initially set itself.

According to syndicalist doctrines, unions should have educated workers in the management of production. Since the industrial unions, it was said, are an integral reflex of a particular industry, they will become the cadres of workers' ability to manage that particular industry; the union roles will act to make possible a choice of the best workers, of the most studious, of the most intelligent, of the most apt to master the complex mechanism of production and of exchange. The worker *leaders* of the leather industry will be the most capable in managing that industry, and so on for the metal industry, for the book industry, etc.

Colossal illusion. The choice of the union *leaders* was never made on criteria of industrial competence, but of merely legal, bureaucratic or demagogic competence. And the more the organizations became larger, the more frequent became their intervention in the class struggle, the more widespread and deep their action, the more it became necessary to reduce the leading office to an office purely of administration and accounting, the more industrial technical capacity became a non-value and bureaucratic and commercial capacity took the upper hand. There was thus formed a real and proper caste of union functionaries and journalists, with a corps psychology absolutely in contrast to the psychology of the workers, which ended with assuming towards the working mass the same position as the governing bureaucracy towards the parliamentary state: it is the bureaucracy which reigns and governs.

The proletarian dictatorship wishes to suppress the order of capitalist production, wishes to suppress private property, because only thus can the exploitation of man by man be suppressed. The proletarian dictatorship wishes to suppress the difference of classes, wishes to suppress the class struggle, because only thus the social emancipation of the working class can be completed. To reach this end the Communist Party educates the proletariat to organize its class power, to make use of this armed power to dominate the bourgeois class and to set the conditions in which the exploiting class will be suppressed and cannot be reborn. The task of the Communist Party in the dictatorship is thus this: to organize powerfully and definitively the class of workers and peasants in a dominant class, check that all the organisms of the new state really develop revolutionary work, and break the ancient rights and relations inherent in the principle of private property.

But this action of destruction and control must be immediately accompanied by positive work of creation of production. If this work does not succeed, political strength is in vain, the dictatorship cannot hold: no society can hold without production, even less so the dictatorship which, establishing itself in conditions of economic breakdown produced by five years of war worsened by months and months of bourgeois armed terrorism, thus needs intense production.

And this is the vast and magnificent task which should be opened to the activity of the industrial unions. They precisely will have to begin the socialization, they will have to initiate a new order of production, in which the enterprise will be based not on the owner's desire for wealth, but on the common interest of the social community which for every branch of industry comes out of the generic formlessness and solidifies in the corresponding workers' union.

In the Hungarian soviet the unions absented themselves from all creative work. Politically the union functionaries placed continual obstacles before the dictatorship, constituting a state within

the state, economically they remained inert: more than once the factories had to be socialized against the will of the unions. But the *leaders* of the Hungarian organizations were limited spiritually, they had a bureaucratic-reformist psychology, and they continuously feared losing the power which until then they had exercised over the workers. Since the function for which the unions had developed until the dictatorship was inherent in the predominance of the bourgeois class, and since the functionaries did not have technical industrial capacity, they maintained the immaturity of the proletarian class in the direct management of production, they maintained “real” democracy, that is the maintenance of the bourgeoisie in its principal positions of the proletarian class, they wanted to perpetuate and worsen the era of the agreements, of the labour contracts, of social legislation, to be capable of making their competence valued. They wanted the international revolution ... to be awaited, not being able to understand the international revolution was happening precisely in Hungary with the Hungarian revolution, in Russia with the Russian revolution, in all of Europe with the general strikes, with the military decrees, with the conditions of life made impossible for the working class by the consequences of war.

Week 8

Communism and Gender

In the period during and after World War I, first-wave feminism swept through Europe. This movement's primary objective was gaining voting rights for women. Female enfranchisement, however, would prove to be an easy task compared to truly implementing feminist social policy.

Women's struggles advanced comparatively quickly in post-Revolutionary Russia. Some changes came under the aegis of the Zhenotdel, the Communist Party's women's department. This body was co-founded and led by Alexandra Kollontai, who is the author of this week's documents. Kollontai comments on historical gender relations and new Communist policy and philosophy on sex and relationships in *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations* and *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*.

The Eley chapters for this week are 12 and 13.

8.1 Alexandra Kollontai, *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations* (1921)

Family and marriage are historical categories, phenomena which develop in accordance with the economic relations that exist at the given level of production. The form of marriage and of the family is thus determined by the economic system of the given epoch, and it changes as the economic base of society changes. The family, in the same way as government, religion, science, morals, law and customs, is part of the superstructure which derives from the economic system of society.

Where economic functions are performed by the family rather than by society as a whole, family and marital relations are more stable and possess a vital capacity: "The less the development of labour, and the more limited its volume of production ... the more preponderantly does the social order appear to be dominated by ties of sex" (Engels, *Origins of the Family*). In the period of natural economy the family formed an enclosed economic unit which was necessary for humankind and thus had a vital capacity. The family was at that time a unit of both production and consumption. Outside the family/economic unit the individual had no means, especially at the earliest levels of the development of society, of sustaining the conditions necessary for life. In some areas and in some countries where capitalism is weakly developed (among the peoples of the East, for example) the peasant family is still fundamentally a family/economic union. With the transition, however, from a natural economy to a merchant capitalist economy based on trade and exchange, the family

ceases to be necessary for the functioning of society and thus loses its strength and vital capacity.

The fact that with the consolidation of the capitalist system of production, the marital/family union develops from a production unit into a legal arrangement concerned only with consumption, leads inevitably to the weakening of marital/family ties. In the era of private property and the bourgeois-capitalist economic system, marriage and the family are grounded in (a) material and financial considerations, (b) economic dependence of the female sex on the family breadwinner – the husband – rather than the social collective, and (c) the need to care for the rising generation. Capitalism maintains a system of individual economies: the family has a role to play in performing economic tasks and functions within the national capitalist economy. Thus under capitalism the family does not merge with or dissolve into the national economy but continues to exist as an independent economic unit, concerned with production in the case of the peasant family and consumption in the case of the urban family. The individual economy which springs from private property is the basis of the bourgeois family.

The communist economy does away with the family. In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat there is a transition to the single production plan and collective social consumption, and the family loses its significance as an economic unit. The external economic functions of the family disappear, and consumption ceases to be organised on an individual family basis, a network of social kitchens and canteens is established, and the making, mending and washing of clothes and other aspects of housework are integrated into the national economy. In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat the family economic unit should be recognised as being, from the point of view of the national economy, not only useless but harmful. The family economic unit involves (a) the uneconomic expenditure of products and fuel on the part of small domestic economies, and (b) unproductive labour, especially by women, in the home – and is therefore in conflict with the interest of the workers' republic in a single economic plan and the expedient use of the labour force (including women).

Under the dictatorship of the proletariat then, the material and economic considerations in which the family was grounded cease to exist. The economic dependence of women on men and the role of the family in the care of the younger generation also disappear, as the communist elements in the workers' republic grow stronger. With the introduction of the obligation of all citizens to work, woman has a value in the national economy which is independent of her family and marital status. The economic subjugation of women in marriage and the family is done away with, and responsibility for the care of the children and their physical and spiritual education is assumed by the social collective. The family teaches and instils egoism thus weakening the ties of the collective and hindering the construction of communism. However, in the new society relations between parents and children are freed from any element of material considerations and enter a new historic stage.

Once the family has been stripped of its economic functions and its responsibilities towards the younger generation and is no longer central to the existence of the woman, it has ceased to be a family. The family unit shrinks to a union of two people based on mutual agreement.

In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the workers' state has to concern itself not with the economic and social unit of the family, since this unit dies as the bonds of communism are consolidated, but with the changing forms of marital relations. The family as an economic unit and as a union of parents and children based on the need to provide for the material welfare of the latter is doomed to disappear. Thus the workers' collective has to establish its attitude not to economic relationships but to the form of relationships between the sexes. What kind of relations between the sexes are in the best interests of the workers' collective? What form of relations would strengthen,

8.1. ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI, *THESES ON COMMUNIST MORALITY IN THE SPHERE OF MARITAL RELATIONS*

not weaken, the collective in the transitional stage between capitalism and communism and would thus assist the construction of the new society? The laws and the morality that the workers' system is evolving are beginning to give an answer to this question.

Once relations between the sexes cease to perform the economic and social function of the former family, they are no longer the concern of the workers' collective. It is not the relationships between the sexes but the result – the child – that concerns the collective. The workers' state recognises its responsibility to provide for maternity, i.e. to guarantee the well-being of the woman and the child, but it does not recognise the couple as a legal unit separate from the workers' collective. The decrees on marriage issued by the workers' republic establishing the mutual rights of the married couple (the right to demand material support from the partner for yourself or the child), and thus giving legal encouragement to the separation of this unit and its interests from the general interests of the workers' social collective (the right of wives to be transferred to the town or village where their husbands are working), are survivals of the past; they contradict the interests of the collective and weaken its bonds, and should therefore be reviewed and changed.

The law ought to emphasise the interest of the workers' collective in maternity and eliminate the situation where the child is dependent on the relationship between its parents. The law of the workers' collective replaces the right of the parents, and the workers' collective keeps a close watch, in the interests of the unified economy and of present and future labour resources. In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat there must, instead of marriage law, be regulation of the relationship of the government to maternity, of the relationship between mother and child and of the relationship between the mother and the workers' collective (i.e. legal norms must regulate the protection of female labour, the welfare of expectant and nursing mothers, the welfare of children and their social education). Legal norms must regulate the relationship between the mother and the socially educated child, and between the father and the child. Fatherhood should not be established through marriage or a relationship of a material nature. The man should be able to choose whether or not to accept the role of fatherhood (i.e. the right which he shares equally with the mother to decide on a social system of education for the child, and the right, where this does not conflict with the interests of the collective, of intellectual contact with the child and the opportunity to influence its development).

There are two grounds on which, in the interests of the workers' collective, the relationships between the sexes ought to be subject to legislative regulations: (a) the health and hygiene of the nation and the race, and (b) the increase or decrease of the population required by the national economic collective. In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the regulation of relationships enters a new phase. Instead of laws and the threat of legal proceedings, the workers' collective must rely on agitational and educational influences, and on social measures to improve the relationships between the sexes and to guarantee the health of the children born from these relationships. For example, the Commissariats of Health and Education must carry out a broad campaign on the question of venereal and other infectious diseases, thereby reducing the danger of these diseases spreading through sexual intercourse and daily living. A person is guilty before the law not for having had sexual relations but for having consciously kept silent and hidden the fact that he or she has the disease from those with whom he or she lives and works, and thus for failing to observe the rule on precautions to be taken to reduce the likelihood of infection.

In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, communist Morality – and not the law – regulates sexual relationships in the interest of the workers' collective and of future generations.

Each historical (and therefore economic) epoch in the development of society has its own ideal of marriage and its own sexual morality. Under the tribal system, with its ties of kinship, the morality

was different from that which developed with the establishment of private property and the rule of the husband and father (patriarchy). Different economic systems have different moral codes. Not only each stage in the development of society, but each class has its corresponding sexual morality (it is sufficient to compare the morals of the feudal landowning class and of the bourgeoisie in one and the same epoch to see that this is true). The more firmly established the principles of private property, the stricter the moral code. The importance of virginity before legal marriage sprang from the principles of private property and the unwillingness of men to pay for the children of others.

Hypocrisy (the outward observance of decorum and the actual practice of depravity), and the double code (one code of behaviour for the man and another for the woman) are the twin pillars of bourgeois morality. Communist morality must above all, resolutely spurn all the hypocrisy inherited from bourgeois society in relationships between the sexes and reject the double standard of morality.

In the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat relations between the sexes should be evaluated only according to the criteria mentioned above – the health of the working population and the development of inner bonds of solidarity within the collective. The sexual act must be seen not as something shameful and sinful but as something which is as natural as the other needs of healthy organism, such as hunger and thirst. Such phenomena cannot be judged as moral or immoral. The satisfaction of healthy and natural instincts only ceases to be normal when the boundaries of hygiene are overstepped. In such cases, not only the health of the person concerned but the interests of the work collective, which needs the strength and energy and health of its members, are threatened. Communist morality, therefore, while openly recognising the normality of sexual interests, condemns unhealthy and unnatural interest in sex (excesses, for example, or sexual relations before maturity has been reached, which exhaust the organism and lower the capacity of men and women for work).

As communist morality is concerned for the health of the population, it also criticises sexual restraint. The preservation of health includes the full and correct satisfaction of all man's needs; norms of hygiene should work to this end, and not artificially suppress such an important function of the organism as the sex drive (Bebel, *Woman and Socialism*). Thus both early sexual experience (before the body has developed and grown strong) and sexual restraint must be seen as equally harmful. This concern for the health of the human race does not establish either monogamy or polygamy as the obligatory form of relations between the sexes, for excesses may be committed in the bounds of the former, and a frequent change of partners by no means signifies sexual intemperance. Science has discovered that when a woman has relationships with many men at one time, her ability to have children is impaired; and relationships with a number of women drain the man and affect the health of his children negatively. Since the workers' collective needs strong and healthy men and women, such arrangements of sexual life are not in its interests.

It is accepted that the psychological state of parents at the moment of conception influences the health and life capacity of the child. Thus in the interests of human health, communist morality criticises sexual relations which are based on physical attraction alone and are not attended by love or fleeting passion. In the interests of the collective, communist morality also criticises persons whose sexual relationships are built not on physical attraction but on calculation, habit or even intellectual affinity.

In view of the need to encourage the development and growth of feelings of solidarity and to strengthen the bonds of the work collective, it should above all be established that the isolation of the "couple" as a special unit does not answer the interests of communism. Communist morality requires the education of the working class in comradeship and the fusion of the hearts and minds of the separate members of this collective. The needs and interests of the individual must be

8.1. ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI, THESES ON COMMUNIST MORALITY IN THE SPHERE OF MARITAL RELATIONS

subordinated to the interests and aims of the collective. On the one hand, therefore, the bonds of family and marriage must be weakened, and on the other, men and women need to be educated in solidarity and the subordination of the will of the individual to the will of the collective. Even at this present, early stage, the workers' republic demands that mothers learn to be the mothers not only of their own child but of all workers' children; it does not recognise the couple as a self-sufficient unit, and does not therefore approve of wives deserting work for the sake of this unit.

As regards sexual relations, communist morality demands first of all an end to all relations based on financial or other economic considerations. The buying and selling of caresses destroys the sense of equality between the sexes. and thus undermines the basis of solidarity without which communist society cannot exist. Moral censure is consequently directed at prostitution in all its forms and at all types of marriage of convenience, even when recognised by Soviet law. The preservation of marriage regulations creates the illusion that the workers' collective can accept the "couple" with its special, exclusive interests. The stronger the ties between the members of the collective, as a whole, the less the need to reinforce marital relations. Secondly, communist morality demands the education of the younger generation in responsibility to the collective and in the consciousness that love is not the only thing in life (this is especially important in the case of women, for they have been taught the opposite for centuries). Love is only one aspect of life, and must not be allowed to overshadow the other facets of the relationships between individual and collective. The ideal of the bourgeoisie was the married couple, where the partners complemented each other so completely that they had no need of contact with society. Communist morality demands, on the contrary, that the younger generation be educated in such a way that the personality of the individual is developed to the full, and the individual with his or her many interests has contact with a range of persons of both sexes. Communist morality encourages the development of many and varied bonds of love and friendship among people. The old ideal was "all for the loved ones"; communist morality demands all for the collective.

Though sex love is seen in the context of the interests of the collective, communist morality demands that people are educated in sensitivity and understanding and are psychologically demanding both to themselves and to their partners. The bourgeois attitude to sexual relations as simply a matter of sex must be criticised and replaced by an understanding of the whole gamut of joyful love-experience that enriches life and makes for greater happiness. The greater the intellectual and emotional development of the individual the less place will there be in his or her relationship for the bare physiological side of love, and the brighter will be the love experience.

In the transitional period, relations between men and women must, in order to meet the interests of the workers' collective, be based on the following considerations. (1) All sexual relationships must be based on mutual inclination, love, infatuation or passion, and in no case on financial or material motivations. All calculation in relationships must be subject to merciless condemnation. (2) The form and length of the relationship are not regulated, but the hygiene of the race, and communist morality require that relationships be based not on the sexual act alone, and that it should not be accompanied by any excesses that threaten health. (3) Those with illnesses etc. that might be inherited should not have children. (4) A jealous and proprietary attitude to the person loved must be replaced by a comradely understanding of the other and an acceptance of his or her freedom. Jealousy is a destructive force of which communist morality cannot approve. (5) The bonds between the members of the collective must be strengthened. The encouragement of the intellectual, and political interests of the younger generation assists the development of healthy and bright emotions in love.

The stronger the collective, the more firmly established becomes the communist way of life. The

closer the emotional ties between the members of the community, the less the need to seek a refuge from loneliness in marriage. Under communism the blind strength of matter is subjugated to the will of the strongly welded and thus unprecedentedly powerful workers' collective. The individual has the opportunity to develop intellectually and emotionally as never before. In this collective, new forms of relationships are maturing and the concept of love is extended and expanded.

8.2 Alexandra Kollontai, Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle (1921)

Among the many problems that demand the consideration and attention of contemporary mankind, sexual problems are undoubtedly some of the most crucial. There isn't a country or a nation, apart from the legendary "islands", where the question of sexual relationships isn't becoming an urgent and burning issue. Mankind today is living through an acute sexual crisis which is far more unhealthy and harmful for being long and drawn-out. Throughout the long journey of human history, you probably won't find a time when the problems of sex have occupied such a central place in the life of society; when the question of relationships between the sexes has been like a conjuror, attracting the attention of millions of troubled people; when sexual dramas have served as such a never-ending source of inspiration for every sort of art.

As the crisis continues and grows more serious, people are getting themselves into an increasingly hopeless situation, and are trying desperately by every available means to settle the "insoluble question". But with every new attempt to solve the problem, the confused knot of personal relationships gets more tangled. It's as if we couldn't see the one and only thread that could finally lead us to success in controlling the stubborn tangle. The sexual problem is like a vicious circle, and however frightened people are and however much they run this way and that, they are unable to break out.

The conservatively inclined part of mankind argue that we should return to the happy times of the past, we should re-establish the old foundations of the family and strengthen the well-tried norms of sexual morality. The champions of bourgeois individualism say that we ought to destroy all the hypocritical restrictions of the obsolete code of sexual behaviour. These unnecessary and repressive "rags" ought to be relegated to the archives – only the individual conscience, the individual will of each person can decide such intimate questions. Socialists, on the other hand, assure us that sexual problems will only be settled when the basic reorganisation of the social and economic structure of society has been tackled. Doesn't this "putting off the problem until tomorrow" suggest that we still haven't found that one and only "magic thread"? Shouldn't we find or at least locate this "magic thread" that promises to unravel the tangle? Shouldn't we find it now, at this very moment? The history of human society, the history of the continual battle between various social groups and classes of opposing aims and interests, gives us the clue to finding this "thread". It isn't the first time that mankind has gone through a sexual crisis. This isn't the first time that the pressure of a rushing tide of new values and ideals has blurred the clear and definite meaning of moral commandments about sexual relationships. The "sexual crisis" was particularly acute at the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, when a great social advance pushed the proud and patriarchal feudal nobility who were used to absolute command into the background, and cleared the way for the development and establishment of a new social force – the bourgeoisie. The sexual morality of the feudal world had developed out of the depths of the tribal way of life – the collective economy and the tribal authoritarian leadership that stifles the individual will of the

individual member. This clashed with the new and strange moral code of the rising bourgeoisie. The sexual morality of the bourgeoisie is founded on principles that are in sharp contradiction to the basic morality of feudalism. Strict individualism and the exclusiveness and isolation of the “nuclear family” replace the emphasis on “collective work” that was characteristic of both the local and regional economic structure of patrimonial life. Under capitalism the ethic of competition, the triumphant principles of individualism and exclusive private property, grew and destroyed whatever remained of the idea of the community, which was to some extent common to all types of tribal life. For a whole century, while the complex laboratory of life was turning the old norms into a new formula and achieving the outward harmony of moral ideas, men wandered confusedly between two very different sexual codes and attempted to accommodate themselves to both.

But in those bright and colourful days of change, the sexual crisis, although profound, did not have the threatening character that it has assumed in our time. The main reason for this is that in “the great days” of the Renaissance, in the “new age” when the bright light of a new spiritual culture flooded the dying world with its clear colours, flooded the bare monotonous life of the Middle Ages, the sexual crisis affected only a relatively small part of the population. By far the largest section of the population, the peasantry, was affected only in the most indirect way and only as, slowly, over the course of centuries, a change in the economic base, in the economic relations of the countryside, took place. At the top of the social ladder a bitter battle between two opposing social worlds was fought out. This involved also a struggle between their different ideals and values and ways of looking at things. It was these people who experienced and were threatened by the sexual crisis that developed. The peasants, wary of new things, continued to cling firmly to the well-trying tribal tradition handed down from their forefathers, and only under the pressure of extreme necessity modified and adapted this tradition to the changing conditions of their economic environment. Even at the height of the struggle between the bourgeois and the feudal world the sexual crisis by-passed the “class of tax-payers”. As the upper strata of society went about breaking up the old ways, the peasants in fact seemed to be more intent on clinging firmly to their traditions. In spite of the continuous whirlwinds that threatened overhead and shook the very soil under their feet, the peasants, especially our Russian peasantry, managed to preserve the basis of their sexual code untouched and unshaken for many centuries.

The story today is very different. The “sexual crisis” does not spare even the peasantry. Like an infectious disease it “knows neither mansions to the rank nor status”. It spreads from the palaces and crowded quarters of the working class, looks in on the peaceful dwelling places of the petty bourgeoisie, and makes its way into the heart of the countryside. It claims victims in the villas of the European bourgeoisie, in the fusty basement of the worker’s family, and in the smoky hut of the peasant. There is “no defence, no bolt” against sexual conflict. To imagine that only the members of the well-off sections of society are floundering and are in the throes of these problems would be to make a grave mistake. The waves of the sexual crisis are sweeping over the threshold of workers’ homes, and creating situations of conflict that are as acute and heartfelt as the psychological sufferings of the “refined bourgeois world”. The sexual crisis no longer interests only the “propertied”. The problems of sex concern the largest section of society – they concern the working class in its daily life. It is therefore, hard to understand why this vital and urgent subject is treated with such indifference. This indifference is unforgivable. One of the tasks that confront the working class in its attack on the “beleaguered fortress of the future” is undoubtedly the task of establishing more healthy and more joyful relationships between the sexes.

What are the roots of this unforgivable indifference to one of the essential tasks of the working class? How can we explain to ourselves the hypocritical way in which “sexual problems” are relegated

to the realm of “private matters” that are not worth the effort and attention of the collective? Why has the fact been ignored that throughout history one of the constant features of social struggle has been the attempt to change relationships between the sexes, and the type of moral codes that determine these relationships; and that the way personal relationships are organised in a certain social group has had a vital influence on the outcome of the struggle between hostile social classes?

The tragedy of our society is not just that the usual forms of behaviour and the principles regulating this behaviour are breaking down, but that a spontaneous wave of new attempts at living is developing from within the social fabric, giving man hopes and ideals that cannot yet be realised. We are people living in the world of property relationships, a world of sharp class contradictions and of an individualistic morality. We still live and think under the heavy hand of an unavoidable loneliness of spirit. Man experiences this “loneliness” even in towns full of shouting, noise and people, even in a crowd of close friends and work-mates. Because of their loneliness men are apt to cling in a predatory and unhealthy way to illusions about finding a soul mate from among the members of the opposite sex. They see sly Eros as the only means of charming away, if only for a time, the gloom of inescapable loneliness.

People have perhaps never in any age felt spiritual loneliness as deeply and persistently as at the present time. People have probably never become so depressed and fallen so fully under the numbing influence of this loneliness. It could hardly be otherwise. The darkness never seems so black as when there’s a light shining just ahead.

The “individualists”, who are only loosely organised into a collective with other individuals, now have the chance to change their sexual relationships so that they are based on the creative principle of friendship and togetherness rather than on something blindly physiological. The individualistic property morality of the present day is beginning to seem very obviously paralysing and oppressive. In criticising the quality of sexual relationships modern man is doing far more than rejecting the outdated forms of behaviour of the current moral code. His lonely soul is seeking the regeneration of the very essence of these relationships. He moans and pines for “great love”, for a situation of warmth and creativity which alone has the power to disperse the cold spirit of loneliness from which present day “individualists” suffer.

If the sexual crisis is three quarters the result of external socioeconomic relationships, the other quarter hinges on our “refined individualistic psyche”, fostered by the ruling bourgeois ideology. The “potential for loving” of people today is, as the German writer Meisel-Hess puts it, at a low ebb. Men and women seek each other in the hope of finding for themselves, through another person, a means to a larger share of spiritual and physical pleasure. It makes no difference whether they are married to the partner or not they give little thought to what’s going on in the other person, to what’s happening to their emotions and psychological processes.

The “crude individualism” that adorns our era is perhaps nowhere as blatant as in the organisation of sexual relationships. A person wants to escape from his loneliness and naively imagines that being “in love” gives him the right to the soul of the other person – the right to warm himself in the rays of that rare blessing of emotional closeness and understanding. We individualists have had our emotions spoiled in the persistent cult of the “ego”. We imagine that we can reach the happiness of being in a state of “great love” with those near to us, without having to give up anything of ourselves.

The claims we make on our “contracted partner” are absolute and undivided. We are unable to follow the simplest rule of love – that another person should be treated with great consideration. New concepts of the relationships between the sexes are already being outlined. They will teach us to achieve relationships based on the unfamiliar ideas of complete freedom, equality and genuine

friendship. But in the meantime mankind has to sit in the cold with its spiritual loneliness and can only dream about the “better age” when all relationships between people will be warmed by the rays of “the sun god”, will experience a sense of togetherness, and will be educated in the new conditions of living. The sexual crisis cannot be solved unless there is a radical reform of the human psyche, and unless man’s potential for loving is increased. And a basic transformation of the socio-economic relationships along communist lines is essential if the psyche is to be re-formed. This is an “old truth” but there is no other way out. The sexual crisis will in no way be reduced, whatever kind of marriage or personal relationships people care to try.

History has never seen such a variety of personal relationships – indissoluble marriage with its “stable family”, “free unions”, secret adultery; a girl living quite openly with her lover in so-called “wild marriage”; pair marriage, marriage in threes and even the complicated marriage of four people – not to talk of the various forms of commercial prostitution. You get the same two moral codes existing side by side in the peasantry as well – a mixture of the old tribal way of life and the developing bourgeois family. Thus you get the permissiveness of the girls’ house¹, side by side with the attitude that fornication, or men sleeping with their daughters-in-law, is a disgrace. It’s surprising that, in the face of the contradictory and tangled forms of present-day personal relationships, people are able to preserve a faith in moral authority, and are able to make sense of these contradictions and thread their way through these mutually destructive and incompatible moral codes. Even the usual justification – “I live by the new morality” – doesn’t help anyone, since the new morality is still only in the process of being formed. Our task is to draw out from the chaos of present-day contradictory sexual norms the shape, and make clear the principles, of a morality that answers the spirit of the progressive and revolutionary class.

Besides the already mentioned inadequacies of the contemporary psyche – extreme individuality, egoism that has become a cult – the “sexual crisis” is made worse by two characteristics of the psychology of modern man:

1. The idea of “possessing” the married partner;
2. The belief that the two sexes are unequal, that they are of unequal worth in every way, in every sphere, including the sexual sphere.

Bourgeois morality, with its introverted individualistic family based entirely on private property, has carefully cultivated the idea that one partner should completely “possess” the other. It has been very successful. The idea of “possession” is more pervasive now than under the patrimonial system of marriage relationships. During the long historical period that developed under the aegis of the “tribe”, the idea of a man possessing his wife (there has never been any thought of a wife having undisputed possession of her husband) did not go further than a purely physical possession. The wife was obliged to be faithful physically – her soul was her own. Even the knights recognised the right of their wives to have *chichesbi* (platonic friends and admirers) and to receive the “devotion” of other knights and minnesingers. It is the bourgeoisie who have carefully tended and fostered the ideal of absolute possession of the “contracted partner’s” emotional as well as physical “I”, thus extending the concept of property rights to include the right to the other person’s whole spiritual and emotional world. Thus the family structure was strengthened and stability guaranteed in the period when the bourgeoisie were struggling for domination. This is the ideal that we have accepted as our heritage and have been prepared to see as an unchangeable moral absolute! The

¹In the traditional Russian villages, the young girls would often get together to rent an old hut or a room in someone’s house. They would gather there in the evenings to tell stories, do needlework and sing. The young men would come to join in the merrymaking. Sometimes it seems that the merrymaking would become an orgy, though there are conflicting ideas about this.

idea of “property” goes far beyond the boundaries of “lawful marriage”. It makes itself felt as an inevitable ingredient of the most “free” union of love. Contemporary lovers with all their respect for freedom are not satisfied by the knowledge of the physical faithfulness alone of the person they love. To be rid of the eternally present threat of loneliness, we “launch an attack” on the emotions of the person we love with a cruelty and lack of delicacy that will not be understood by future generations. We demand the right to know every secret of this person’s being. The modern lover would forgive physical unfaithfulness sooner than “spiritual” unfaithfulness. He sees any emotion experienced outside the boundaries of the “free” relationship as the loss of his own personal treasure.

People “in love” are unbelievably insensitive in their relations to a third person. We have all no doubt observed this strange situation two people who love each other are in a hurry, before they have got to know each other properly, to exercise their rights over all the relationships that the other person has formed up till that time, to look into the innermost corners of their partner’s life. Two people who yesterday were unknown to each other, and who come together in a single moment of mutual erotic feeling, rush to get at the heart of the other person’s being. They want to feel that this strange and incomprehensible psyche. With its past experience that can never be suppressed, is an extension of their own self. The idea that the married pair are each other’s property is so accepted that when a young couple who were yesterday each living their own separate lives are today opening each other’s correspondence without a blush, and making common property of the words of a third person who is a friend of only one of them, this hardly strikes us as something unnatural. But this kind of “intimacy” is only really possible when people have been working out their lives together for a long period of time. Usually a dishonest kind of closeness is substituted for this genuine feeling, the deception being fostered by the mistaken idea that a physical relationship between two people is a sufficient basis for extending the rights of possession to each other’s emotional being.

The “inequality” of the sexes – the inequality of their rights, the unequal value of their physical and emotional experience – is the other significant circumstance that distorts the psyche of contemporary man and is a reason for the deepening of the “sexual crisis”. The “double morality” inherent in both patrimonial and bourgeois society has, over the course of centuries, poisoned the psyche of men and women. These attitudes are so much a part of us that they are more difficult to get rid of than the ideas about possessing people that we have inherited only from bourgeois ideology. The idea that the sexes are unequal, even in the sphere of physical and emotional experience, means that the same action will be regarded differently according to whether it was the action of a man or a woman. Even the most “progressive” member of the bourgeoisie, who has long ago rejected the whole code of current morality, easily catches himself out at this point since he too in judging a man and a woman for the same behaviour will pass different sentences. One simple example is enough. Imagine that a member of the middle-class intelligentsia who is learned, involved in politics and social affairs – who is in short a “personality”, even a “public figure” – starts sleeping with his cook (a not uncommon thing to happen) and even becomes legally married to her. Does bourgeois society change its attitude to this man, does the event throw even the tiniest shadow of doubt as to his moral worth? Of course not.

Now imagine another situation. A respected woman of bourgeois society – a social figure, a research student, a doctor, or a writer, it’s all the same – becomes friendly with her footman, and to complete the scandal marries him. How does bourgeois society react to the behaviour of the hitherto “respected” woman? They cover her with “scorn”, of course! And remember, it’s so much the worse for her if her husband, the footman, is good-looking or possesses other “physical qualities”. “It’s obvious what she’s fallen for”, will be the sneer of the hypocritical bourgeoisie.

If a woman’s choice has anything of an “individual character” about it she won’t be forgiven

by bourgeois society. This attitude is a kind of throwback to the traditions of tribal times. Society still wants a woman to take into account, when she is making her choice, rank and status and the instructions and interests of her family. Bourgeois society cannot see a woman as an independent person separate from her family unit and outside the isolated circle of domestic obligations and virtues. Contemporary society goes even further than the ancient tribal society in acting as woman's trustee, instructing her not only to marry but to fall in love only with those people who are "worthy" of her.

We are continually meeting men of considerable spiritual and intellectual qualities who have chosen as their friend-for-life a worthless and empty woman, who in no way matches the spiritual worth of the husband. We accept this as something normal and we don't think twice about it. At the most friends might pity Ivan Ivanovich for having landed himself with such an unbearable wife. But if it happens the other way round, we flap our hands and exclaim with concern. "How could such an outstanding woman as Maria Petrovna fall for such a nonentity? I begin to doubt the worth of Maria Petrovna." Where do we get this double criterion from? What is the reason for it? The reason is undoubtedly that the idea of the sexes being of "different value" has become, over the centuries, a part of man's psychological make-up. We are used to evaluating a woman not as a personality with individual qualities and failings irrespective of her physical and emotional experience, but only as an appendage of a man. This man, the husband or the lover, throws the light of his personality over the woman, and it is this reflection and not the woman herself that we consider to be the true definition of her emotional and moral make-up. In the eyes of society the personality of a man can be more easily separated from his actions in the sexual sphere. The personality of a woman is judged almost exclusively in terms of her sexual life. This type of attitude stems from the role that women have played in society over the centuries, and it is only now that a re-evaluation of these attitudes is slowly being achieved, at least in outline. Only a change in the economic role of woman, and her independent involvement in production, can and will bring about the weakening of these mistaken and hypocritical ideas.

The three basic circumstances distorting the modern psyche – extreme egoism, the idea that married partners possess each other, and the acceptance of the inequality of the sexes in terms of physical and emotional experience – must be faced if the sexual problem is to be settled. People will find the "magic key" with which they can break out of their situation only when their psyche has a sufficient store of "feelings of consideration", when their ability to love is greater, when the idea of freedom in personal relationships becomes fact and when the principle of "comradeship" triumphs over the traditional idea of inequality and submission. The sexual problems cannot be solved without this radical re-education of our psyche.

But isn't this asking too much? Isn't the suggestion utopian without foundation, the naive notion of a dreaming idealist? How are you honestly going to raise mankind's "potential for loving"? Haven't wise men of all nations since time immemorial, beginning with Buddha and Confucius and ending with Christ, been busying themselves over this? And who can say if the "potential for loving" has been raised? Isn't this kind of well-meaning daydream about the solution of the sexual crisis simply a confession of weakness and a refusal to go on with the search for the "magic key"?

Is that the case? Is the radical re-education of our psyche and our approach to sexual relationships something so unlikely, so removed from reality? Couldn't one say that, on the contrary, while great social and economic changes are in progress, the conditions are being created that demand and give rise to a new basis for psychological experience that is in line with what we have been talking about? Another class, a new social group, is coming forward to replace the bourgeoisie, with its bourgeois ideology, and its individualistic code of sexual morality. The progressive class, as

it develops in strength, cannot fail to reveal new ideas about relationships between the sexes that form in close connection with the problems of its social class.

The complicated evolution of socio-economic relations taking place before our eyes, which changes all our ideas about the role of women in social life and undermines the sexual morality of the bourgeoisie, has two contradictory results. On the one hand we see mankind's tireless efforts to adapt to the new, changing socio-economic conditions. This is manifest either in an attempt to preserve the "old forms" while providing them with a new content (the observance of the external form of the indissoluble, strictly monogamous marriage with an acceptance, in practice, of the freedom of the partners) or in the acceptance of new forms which contain however all the elements of the moral code of bourgeois marriage (the "free" union where the compulsive possessiveness of the partners is greater than within legal marriage). On the other hand we see the slow but steady appearance of new forms of relationships between the sexes that differ from the old norms in outward form and in spirit.

Mankind is not groping its way toward these new ideas with much confidence, but we need to look at its attempt, however vague it is at the moment, since it is an attempt closely linked with the tasks of the proletariat as the class which is to capture the "beleaguered fortress" of the future. If, amongst the complicated labyrinth of contradictory and tangled sexual norms, you want to find the beginnings of more healthy relationships between the sexes – relationships that promise to lead humanity out of the sexual crisis – you have to leave the "cultured quarters" of the bourgeoisie with their refined individualistic psyche, and take a look at the huddled dwelling-places of the working class. There, amidst the horror and squalor of capitalism, amidst tears and curses, the springs of life are welling up.

You can see the double process which we have just mentioned working itself out in the lives of the proletariat, who have to exist under the pressure of harsh economic conditions, cruelly exploited by capitalism. You can see both the process of "passive adjustment" and that of active opposition to the existing reality. The destructive influence of capitalism destroys the basis of the worker's family and forces him unconsciously to "adapt" to the existing conditions. This gives rise to a whole series of situations with regard to relationships between the sexes are similar to those in other social classes. Under the pressure of low wages the worker inevitably tends to get married at a later age. If twenty years ago a worker usually got married between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, he now shoulders the cares of a family only towards his thirtieth year. The higher the cultural demands of the worker – the more he values the opportunity of being in contact with cultural life, of visiting theatres and lectures, of reading papers and magazines, of giving his spare time to struggle and politics or to some favourite pursuit such as art or reading etc. – the later he tends to get married. But physical needs won't take a financial situation into consideration: they insist on making themselves felt. The working-class bachelor, in the same way as the middle-class bachelor, looks to prostitution for an outlet. This is an example of the passive adjustment of the working class to the unfavourable conditions of their existence. Take another example. When the worker marries, the low level of pay forces the worker's family to "regulate" childbirth just as the bourgeois family does. The frequent cases of infanticide, the growth of prostitution – these are all expressions of the same process. These are all examples of adjustment by the working class to the surrounding reality. But this is not a process characteristic of the proletariat alone. All the other classes and sections of the population caught up in the world process of capitalist development react in this way.

We see a difference only when we begin to talk about the active, creative forces at work that oppose rather than adapt to the repressive reality, and about the new ideals and attempts at new

relationship between the sexes. It is only within the working class that this active opposition is taking shape. This doesn't mean that the other classes and sections of the population (particularly the middle-class intelligentsia who, by the circumstances of their social existence, stand closest to the working class) don't adopt the "new" forms that are being worked out by the progressive working class. The bourgeoisie, motivated by an instinctive desire to breathe new life into their dead and feeble forms of marriage, seize upon the "new" ideas of the working class. But the ideals and code of sexual morality that the working class develops do not serve the class needs of the bourgeoisie. They reflect the demands of the working class and therefore serve as a new weapon in its social struggle. They help shatter the foundations of the social domination of the bourgeoisie. Let us make this point clear by an example.

The attempt by the middle-class intelligentsia to replace indissoluble marriage by the freer, more easily broken ties of civil marriage destroys the essential basis of the social stability of the bourgeoisie. It destroys the monogamous, property-orientated family. On the other hand, a greater fluidity in relationships between the sexes coincides with and is even the indirect result of one of the basic tasks of the working class. The rejection of the element of "submission" in marriage is going to destroy the last artificial ties of the bourgeois family. This act of "submission" on the part of one member of the working class to another, in the same way as the sense of possessiveness in relationships, has a harmful effect on the proletarian psyche. It is not in the interests of that revolutionary class to elect only certain members as its independent representatives, whose duty it is to serve the class interests before the interests of the individual, isolated family. Conflicts between the interests of the family and the interests of the class which occur at the time of a strike or during an active struggle, and the moral yardstick with which the proletariat views such events, are sufficiently clear evidence of the basis of the new proletarian ideology.

Suppose family affairs require a businessman to take his capital out of a firm at a time when the enterprise is in financial difficulties. Bourgeois morality is clear-cut in its estimate of his action: "The interests of the family come first". We can compare with this the attitude of workers to a strikebreaker who defies his comrades and goes to work during a strike to save his family from being hungry. "The interests of the class come first". Here's another example. The love and loyalty of the middle-class husband to his family are sufficient to divert his wife from all interests outside the home and end up by tying her to the nursery and the kitchen. "The ideal husband can support the ideal family" is the way the bourgeoisie looks at it. But how do workers look upon a "conscious" member of their class who shuts the eyes of his wife or girl-friend to the social struggle? For the sake of individual happiness, for the sake of the family, the morality of the working class will demand that women take part in the life that is unfolding beyond the doorsteps. The "captivity" of women in the home, the way family interests are placed before all else, the widespread exercise of absolute property rights by the husband over the wife – all these things are being broken down by the basic principle of the working-class ideology of "comradely solidarity". The idea that some members are unequal and must submit to other members of one and the same class is in contradiction with the basic proletarian principle of comradeship. This principle of comradeship is basic to the ideology of the working class. It colours and determines the whole developing proletarian morality, a morality which helps to re-educate the personality of man, allowing him to be capable of feeling, capable of freedom instead of being bound by a sense of property, capable of comradeship rather than inequality and submission.

It is an old truth that every new class that develops as a result an advance in economic growth and material culture offers mankind an appropriately new ideology. The code of sexual behaviour is a part of this ideology. However it is worth saying something about "proletarian ethics" or "proletarian

sexual morality”, in order to criticise the well-worn idea that proletarian sexual morality is no more than super-structure and that there is no place for any change in this sphere until the economic base of society has been changed. As if the ideology of a certain class is formed only when the breakdown in the socio-economic relationships, guaranteeing the dominance of that class, has been completed! All the experience of history teaches us that a social group works out its ideology, and consequently its sexual morality, in the process of its struggle with hostile social forces.

Only with the help of new spiritual values, created within and answering the needs of the class, will that class manage to strengthen its social position. It can only successfully win power from those groups in society that are hostile to it by holding to these new norms and ideals. To search for the basic criteria for a morality that can reflect the interests of the working class, and to see that the developing sexual norms are in accordance with these criteria – this is the task that must be tackled by the ideologists of the working class. We have to understand that it is only by becoming aware of the creative process that is going on within society, and of the new demands, new ideals and new norms that are being formed, only by becoming clear about the bash of the sexual morality of the progressive class, that we can possibly make sense of the chaos and contradictions of sexual relationships and find the thread that will make it possible to undo the tightly rolled up tangle of sexual problems.

We must remember that only a code of sexual morality that is in harmony with the problems of the working class can serve as an important weapon in strengthening the working class’ fighting position. The experience of history teaches us that much. What can stop us using this weapon in the interests of the working class, who are fighting for a communist system and for new relationships between the sexes that are deeper and more joyful?

Week 9

Fascism and War

Power struggles in the USSR following Lenin's death led to Joseph Stalin ascending to a position of unchallenged leadership. His philosophy of "socialism in one country" – that is, the Soviet Union – was a reverse of traditional socialist thought which stressed world revolution. One prominent Bolshevik that Stalin outmaneuvered – and later expelled from the USSR – was Leon Trotsky, a key figure in the Party's seizure and maintenance of power. Trotsky would go on to denounce Stalin and form a Fourth International.

With the failure of the non-Russian socialist revolutions elsewhere in Europe, fascism emerged as an ideological alternative. European Communist Parties adopted a "Popular Front" strategy, uniting with anyone else who would oppose the great threat of fascism. Communist Parties themselves were often outlawed and driven underground, later becoming the vanguard of the armed resistance against fascism in many countries.

Fascist governments took power in Italy in 1922 and Germany in 1933, via the National Socialists (Nazis). In Spain, fascist forces crushed Republican forces and the Spanish Revolution in the Spanish Civil War, a prelude to World War II. With the Nazi invasion of Poland and, later, the USSR, the cataclysm in Europe began in earnest, pitting fascist armies against Soviet and Western democratic ones.

This week's readings emerged in a political climate dominated by the menace of fascism: Trotsky's *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, Anton Pannekoek's *The Failure of the Working Class and State Capitalism and Dictatorship* and German Marxist Karl Korsch's *The Fascist Counter-revolution*. They are supplemented by contemporary left communist Gilles Dauvé's *When Insurrections Die*.

The Eley chapters for this week are 16, 17 and 18.

9.1 Leon Trotsky, The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International (1938)

The Objective Prerequisites for a Socialist Revolution

The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.

The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be reached under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate. Already new inventions and improvements fail to raise the level of material wealth. Conjunctural crises under the conditions of the social crisis of the whole capitalist system inflict ever heavier deprivations and sufferings upon the masses. Growing unemployment, in its turn, deepens the financial crisis of the state and undermines the unstable monetary systems. Democratic regimes, as well as fascist, stagger on from one bankruptcy to another.

The bourgeoisie itself sees no way out. In countries where it has already been forced to stake its last upon the card of fascism, it now toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe. In the historically privileged countries, i.e., in those where the bourgeoisie can still for a certain period permit itself the luxury of democracy at the expense of national accumulations (Great Britain, France, United States, etc.), all of capital's traditional parties are in a state of perplexity bordering on a paralysis of will.

The "New Deal," despite its first period of pretentious resoluteness, represents but a special form of political perplexity, possible only in a country where the bourgeoisie succeeded in accumulating incalculable wealth. The present crisis, far from having run its full course, has already succeeded in showing that "New Deal" politics, like Popular Front politics in France, opens no new exit from the economic blind alley.

International relations present no better picture. Under the increasing tension of capitalist disintegration, imperialist antagonisms reach an impasse at the height of which separate clashes and bloody local disturbances (Ethiopia, Spain, the Far East, Central Europe) must inevitably coalesce into a conflagration of world dimensions. The bourgeoisie, of course, is aware of the mortal danger to its domination represented by a new war. But that class is now immeasurably less capable of averting war than on the eve of 1914.

All talk to the effect that historical conditions have not yet "ripened" for socialism is the product of ignorance or conscious deception. The objective prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only "ripened"; they have begun to get somewhat rotten. Without a socialist revolution, in the next historical period at that, a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind. The turn is now to the proletariat, i.e., chiefly to its revolutionary vanguard. The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership.

The Proletariat and its Leadership

The economy, the state, the politics of the bourgeoisie and its international relations are completely blighted by a social crisis, characteristic of a prerevolutionary state of society. The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the prerevolutionary into a revolutionary state is the opportunist character of proletarian leadership: its petty bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and its perfidious connection with it even in its death agony.

In all countries the proletariat is racked by a deep disquiet. The multimillioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines.

The Spanish proletariat has made a series of heroic attempts since April 1931 to take power in its hands and guide the fate of society. However, its own parties (Social Democrats, Stalinists, Anarchists, POUMists) – each in its own way acted as a brake and thus prepared Franco's triumphs.

In France, the great wave of "sit down" strikes, particularly during June 1936, revealed the wholehearted readiness of the proletariat to overthrow the capitalist system. However, the leading

organizations (Socialists, Stalinists, Syndicalists) under the label of the Popular Front succeeded in canalizing and damming, at least temporarily, the revolutionary stream.

The unprecedented wave of sit down strikes and the amazingly rapid growth of industrial unionism in the United States (the CIO) is the most indisputable expression of the instinctive striving of the American workers to raise themselves to the level of the tasks imposed on them by history. But here, too, the leading political organizations, including the newly created CIO, do everything possible to keep in check and paralyze the revolutionary pressure of the masses.

The definite passing over of the Comintern to the side of bourgeois order, its cynically counter-revolutionary role throughout the world, particularly in Spain, France, the United States and other “democratic” countries, created exceptional supplementary difficulties for the world proletariat. Under the banner of the October Revolution, the conciliatory politics practiced by the “People’s Front” doom the working class to impotence and clear the road for fascism.

“People’s Fronts” on the one hand – fascism on the other: these are the last political resources of imperialism in the struggle against the proletarian revolution. From the historical point of view, however, both these resources are stopgaps. The decay of capitalism continues under the sign of the Phrygian cap in France as under the sign of the swastika in Germany. Nothing short of the overthrow of the bourgeoisie can open a road out.

The orientation of the masses is determined first by the objective conditions of decaying capitalism, and second, by the treacherous politics of the old workers’ organizations. Of these factors, the first, of course, is the decisive one: the laws of history are stronger than the bureaucratic apparatus. No matter how the methods of the social betrayers differ – from the “social” legislation of Blum to the judicial frame-ups of Stalin – they will never succeed in breaking the revolutionary will of the proletariat. As time goes on, their desperate efforts to hold back the wheel of history will demonstrate more clearly to the masses that the crisis of the proletarian leadership, having become the crisis in mankind’s culture, can be resolved only by the Fourth International.

The Minimum Program and the Transitional Program

The strategic task of the next period – prerevolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization – consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard (the confusion and disappointment of the older generation, the inexperience of the younger generation). It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.

Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its program into two parts independent of each other: the minimum program which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the *maximum program* which promised substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and the maximum program no bridge existed. And indeed Social Democracy has no need of such a bridge, since the word *socialism* is used only for holiday speechifying. The Comintern has set out to follow the path of Social Democracy in an epoch of decaying capitalism: when, in general, there can be no discussion of systematic social reforms and the raising of the masses’ living standards; when every serious demand of the proletariat and even every serious demand of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably reaches beyond the limits of capitalist property relations and of the bourgeois state.

The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow. Its political aim is the conquest of power by the proletariat for the purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie. However, the achievement of this strategic task is unthinkable without the most considered attention to all, even small and partial, questions of tactics. All sections of the proletariat, all its layers, occupations and groups should be drawn into the revolutionary movement. The present epoch is distinguished not for the fact that it frees the revolutionary party from day-to-day work but because it permits this work to be carried on indissolubly with the actual tasks of the revolution.

The Fourth International does not discard the program of the old “minimal” demands to the degree to which these have preserved at least part of their vital forcefulness. Indefatigably, it defends the democratic rights and social conquests of the workers. But it carries on this day-to-day work within the framework of the correct actual, that is, revolutionary perspective. Insofar as the old, partial, “minimal” demands of the masses clash with the destructive and degrading tendencies of decadent capitalism – and this occurs at each step – the Fourth International advances a system of *transitional demands*, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very bases of the bourgeois regime. The old “minimal program” is superseded by the *transitional program*, the task of which lies in systematic mobilization of the masses for the proletarian revolution.

Sliding Scale of Wages and Sliding Scale of Hours

Under the conditions of disintegrating capitalism, the masses continue to live the meagerized life of the oppressed, threatened now more than at any other time with the danger of being cast into the pit of pauperism. They must defend their mouthful of bread, if they cannot increase or better it. There is neither the need nor the opportunity to enumerate here those separate, partial demands which time and again arise on the basis of concrete circumstances – national, local, trade union. But two basic economic afflictions, in which is summarized the increasing absurdity of the capitalist system, that is, *unemployment* and *high prices*, demand generalized slogans and methods of struggle.

The Fourth International declares uncompromising war on the politics of the capitalists which, to a considerable degree, like the politics of their agents, the reformists, aims to place the whole burden of militarism, the crisis, the disorganization of the monetary system and all other scourges stemming from capitalism’s death agony upon the backs of the toilers. The Fourth International demands *employment* and *decent living conditions* for all.

Neither monetary inflation nor stabilization can serve as slogans for the proletariat because these are but two ends of the same stick. Against a bounding rise in prices, which with the approach of war will assume an ever more unbridled character, one can fight only under the slogan of a sliding scale of wages. This means that collective agreements should assure an automatic rise in wages in relation to the increase in price of consumer goods.

Under the menace of its own disintegration, the proletariat cannot permit the transformation of an increasing section of the workers into chronically unemployed paupers, living off the slops of a crumbling society. The *right to employment* is the only serious right left to the worker in a society based upon exploitation. This right today is left to the worker in a society based upon exploitation. This right today is being shorn from him at every step. Against unemployment, “structural” as well as “conjunctural,” the time is ripe to advance along with the slogan of public works, the slogan of a *sliding scale of working hours*. Trade unions and other mass organizations should bind the workers and the unemployed together in the solidarity of mutual responsibility. On this basis all the work

on hand would then be divided among all existing workers in accordance with how the extent of the working week is defined. The average wage of every worker remains the same as it was under the old working week. Wages, under a strictly guaranteed *minimum*, would follow the movement of prices. It is impossible to accept any other program for the present catastrophic period.

Property owners and their lawyers will prove the “unrealizability” of these demands. Smaller, especially ruined capitalists, in addition will refer to their account ledgers. The workers categorically denounce such conclusions and references. The question is not one of a “normal” collision between opposing material interests. The question is one of guarding the proletariat from decay, demoralization and ruin. The question is one of life or death of the only creative and progressive class, and by that token of the future of mankind. If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish. “Realizability” or “unrealizability” is in the given instance a question of the relationship of forces, which can be decided only by the struggle. By means of this struggle, no matter what immediate practical successes may be, the workers will best come to understand the necessity of liquidating capitalist slavery.

...

The USSR and Problems of the Transitional Epoch

The Soviet Union emerged from the October Revolution as a workers’ state. State ownership of the means of production, a necessary prerequisite to socialist development, opened up the possibility of rapid growth of the productive forces. But the apparatus of the workers’ state underwent a complete degeneration at the same time: it was transformed from a weapon of the working class into a weapon of bureaucratic violence against the working class and more and more a weapon for the sabotage of the country’s economy. The bureaucratization of a backward and isolated workers’ state and the transformation of the bureaucracy into an all-powerful privileged caste constitute the most convincing refutation – not only theoretically, but this time, practically – of the theory of socialism in one country.

The USSR thus embodies terrific contradictions. But it still remains a *degenerated workers’ state*. Such is the social diagnosis. The political prognosis has an alternative character: either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers’ state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism.

To the sections of the Fourth International, the Moscow Trials came not as a surprise and not as a result of the personal madness of the Kremlin dictator, but as the legitimate offspring of the Thermidor. They grew out of the unbearable conflicts within the Soviet bureaucracy itself, which in turn mirror the contradictions between the bureaucracy and the people, as well as the deepening antagonisms among the “people” themselves. The bloody “fantastic” nature of the trials gives the measure of the intensity of the contradictions and by the same token predicts the approach of the denouement.

The public utterances of former foreign representatives of the Kremlin, who refused to return to Moscow, irrefutably confirm in their own way that all shades of political thought are to be found among the bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F. Butenko). The revolutionary elements within the bureaucracy, only a small minority, reflect, passively it is true, the socialist interests of the proletariat. The fascist, counterrevolutionary elements, growing uninterruptedly, express with even greater consistency the interests of world imperialism. These candidates for the role of compradors consider, not without reason, that the new ruling layer can

insure their positions of privilege only through rejection of nationalization, collectivization and monopoly of foreign trade in the name of the assimilation of "Western civilization" i.e., capitalism. Between these two poles, there are intermediate, diffused Menshevik-SR-liberal tendencies which gravitate toward bourgeois democracy.

Within the very ranks of that so-called "classless" society, there unquestionably exist groupings exactly similar to those in the bureaucracy, only less sharply expressed and in inverse proportions: conscious capitalist tendencies distinguish mainly the prosperous part of the collective farms (*kolkhozi*) and are characteristic of only a small minority of the population. But this layer provides itself with a wide base for petty bourgeois tendencies of accumulating personal wealth at the expense of general poverty, and are consciously encouraged by the bureaucracy.

Atop this system of mounting antagonisms, trespassing ever more on the social equilibrium, the Thermidorian oligarchy, today reduced mainly to Stalin's Bonapartist clique, hangs on by terroristic methods. The latest judicial frame-ups were aimed as a blow *against the left*. This is true also of the mopping up of the leaders of the Right Opposition, because the Right group of the old Bolshevik Party, seen from the view point of the bureaucracy's interests and tendencies, represented a *left* danger. The fact that the Bonapartist clique, likewise in fear of its own right allies of the type of Butenko, is forced in the interests of self-preservation to execute the generation of Old Bolsheviks almost to a man, offers indisputable testimony of the vitality of revolutionary traditions among the masses as well as of their growing discontent.

Petty bourgeois democrats of the West, having but yesterday assayed the Moscow Trials as unalloyed gold, today repeat insistently that there is "neither Trotskyism nor Trotskyists within the USSR." They fail to explain, however, why all the purges are conducted under the banner of a struggle with precisely this danger. If we are to examine "Trotskyism" as a finished program, and, even more to the point, as an organization, then unquestionably "Trotskyism" is extremely weak in the USSR. However, its indestructible force stems from the fact that it expresses not only revolutionary tradition, but also today's actual opposition of the Russian working class. The social hatred stored up by the workers against the bureaucracy – this is precisely what from the viewpoint of the Kremlin clique constitutes "Trotskyism." It fears with a deathly and thoroughly well-grounded fear the bond between the deep but inarticulate indignation of the workers and the organization of the Fourth International.

The extermination of the generation of Old Bolsheviks and of the revolutionary representatives of the middle and young generations has acted to disrupt the political equilibrium still more in favor of the right, bourgeois wing of the bureaucracy and of its allies throughout the land. From them, i.e., from the right, we can expect ever more determined attempts in the next period to revise the socialist character of the USSR and bring it closer in pattern to "Western civilization" in its fascist form.

From this perspective, impelling concreteness is imparted to the question of the "defense of the USSR." If tomorrow the bourgeois-fascist grouping, the "faction of Butenko," so to speak, should attempt the conquest of power, the "faction of Reiss" inevitably would align itself on the opposite side of the barricades. Although it would find itself temporarily the ally of Stalin, it would nevertheless defend not the Bonapartist clique but the social base of the USSR, i.e., the property wrenched away from the capitalists and transformed into state property. Should the "faction of Butenko" prove to be in alliance with Hitler, then the "faction of Reiss" would defend the USSR from military intervention, inside the country as well as on the world arena. Any other course would be a betrayal.

Although it is thus impermissible to deny in advance the possibility, in strictly defined instances,

of a “united front” with the Thermidorian section of the bureaucracy against open attack by capitalist counterrevolution, the chief political task in the USSR still remains the *overthrow of this same Thermidorian bureaucracy*. Each day added to its domination helps rot the foundations of the socialist elements of economy and increases the chances for capitalist restoration. It is in precisely this direction that the Comintern moves as the agent and accomplice of the Stalinist clique in strangling the Spanish Revolution and demoralizing the international proletariat.

As in fascist countries, the chief strength of the bureaucracy lies not in itself but in the disillusionment of the masses, in their lack of a new perspective. As in fascist countries, from which Stalin’s *political* apparatus does not differ, save in more unbridled savagery, only preparatory propagandistic work is possible today in the USSR. As in fascist countries, the impetus to the Soviet workers’ revolutionary upsurge will probably be given by events outside the country. The struggle against the Comintern on the world arena is the most important part today of the struggle against the Stalinist dictatorship. There are many signs that the Comintern’s downfall, because it does not have a *direct* base in the GPU, will precede the downfall of the Bonapartist clique and the Thermidorian bureaucracy as a whole.

A fresh upsurge of the revolution in the USSR will undoubtedly begin under the banner of the struggle against *social inequality and political oppression*. Down with the privileges of the bureaucracy! Down with Stakhanovism! Down with the Soviet aristocracy and its ranks and orders! Greater equality of wages for all forms of labor!

The struggle for the freedom of the trade unions and the factory committees, for the right of assembly and freedom of the press, will unfold in the struggle for the regeneration and development of *Soviet democracy*.

The bureaucracy replaced the soviets as class organs with the fiction of universal electoral rights – in the style of Hitler-Goebbels. It is necessary to return to the soviets not only their free democratic form but also their class content. As once the bourgeoisie and kulaks were not permitted to enter the soviets, so now *it is necessary to drive the bureaucracy and the new aristocracy out of the soviets*. In the soviets there is room only for representatives of the workers, rank-and-file collective farmers peasants and Red Army men.

Democratization of the soviets is impossible without legalization of *soviet parties*. The workers and peasants themselves by their own free vote will indicate what parties they recognize as soviet parties.

A revision of *planned economy* from top to bottom in the interests of producers and consumers! Factory committees should be returned the right to control production. A democratically organized consumers’ cooperative should control the quality and price of products.

Reorganization of the *collective farms* in accordance with the will and in the interests of the workers there engaged!

The reactionary *international policy* of the bureaucracy should be replaced by the policy of proletarian internationalism. The complete diplomatic correspondence of the Kremlin to be published. *Down with secret diplomacy!*

All political trials, staged by the Thermidorian bureaucracy, to be reviewed in the light of complete publicity and controversial openness and integrity. Only the victorious revolutionary uprising of the oppressed masses can revive the Soviet regime and guarantee its further development toward socialism. There is but one party capable of leading the Soviet masses to insurrection – the party of the Fourth International!

9.2 Anton Pannekoek, State Capitalism and Dictatorship (1936)

I

The term “State Capitalism” is frequently used in two different ways: first, as an economic form in which the state performs the role of the capitalist employer, exploiting the workers in the interest of the state. The federal mail system or a state-owned railway are examples of this kind of state capitalism. In Russia, this form of state capitalism predominates in industry: the work is planned, financed and managed by the state; the directors of industry are appointed by the state and profits are considered the income of the state. Second, we find that a condition is defined as state capitalism (or state socialism) under which capitalist enterprises are controlled by the state. This definition is misleading, however, as there still exists under these conditions capitalism in the form of private ownership, although the owner of an enterprise is no longer the sole master, his power being restricted so long as some sort of social insurance system for the workers is accepted.

It depends now on the degree of state interference in private enterprises. If the state passes certain laws affecting employment conditions, such as the hiring and firing of workers, if enterprises are being financed by a federal banking system, or subventions are being granted to support the export trade, or if by law the limit of dividends for the large corporations is fixed – then a condition will be reached under which state control will regulate the entire economic life. This will vary from the strict state capitalism in certain degrees. Considering the present economic situation in Germany we could consider a sort of state capitalism prevailing there. The rulers of big industry in Germany are not subordinated subjects of the state but are the ruling power in Germany through the fascist officials in the governing offices. The National Socialist Party developed as a tool of these rulers. In Russia, on the other hand, the bourgeoisie was destroyed by the October Revolution and has disappeared completely as a ruling power. The bureaucracy of the Russian government took control of the growing industry. Russian state capitalism could be developed as there was no powerful bourgeoisie in existence. In Germany, as in western Europe and in America, the bourgeoisie is in complete power, the owner of capital and the means of production. This is essential for the character of capitalism. The decisive factor is the character of that class which are the owners in full control of capital and not the inner form of administration nor the degree of state interference in the economic life of the population. Should this class consider it a necessity to bind itself by stricter regulation – a step that would also make the smaller private capitalists more dependent upon the will of the big capitalists – the character of private capitalism would still remain. We must therefore distinguish the difference between state capitalism and such private capitalism that may be regulated to the highest degree by the state.

Strict regulations are not simply to be looked upon as an attempt to find a way out of the crisis. Political considerations also play a part. Examples of state regulation point to one general aim: preparation for war. The war industry is regulated, as well as the farmers’ production of food – in order to be prepared for war. Impoverished by the results of the last war – robbed of provinces, raw materials, colonies, capital, the German bourgeoisie must try to rehabilitate its remaining forces by rigorous concentration. Foreseeing war as a last resort, it puts as much of its resources as is necessary into the hands of state control. When faced with the common aim for new world power, the private interests of the various sections of the bourgeoisie are put into the background. All the capitalist powers are confronted with this question: to what extent the state, as the representative of the common interests of the national bourgeoisie, should be entrusted with powers over persons,

finances and industry in the international struggle for power – This explains why in those nations of a poor but rapidly increasing population, without any or with but few colonies (such as Italy, Germany, Japan) the state has assumed the greatest power.

One can raise the question: is not state capitalism the only “way out” for the bourgeoisie – Obviously state capitalism would be feasible, if only the whole productive process could be managed and planned centrally from above in order to meet the needs of the population and eliminate crises. If such conditions were brought about, the bourgeoisie would then cease being a real bourgeoisie. In bourgeois society, not only exploitation of the working class exists but there must also exist the constant struggle of the various sections of the capitalist class for markets and for sources of capital investment. This struggle among the capitalists is quite different from the old free competition on the market. Under cover of cooperation of capital within the nation there exists a continuous struggle between huge monopolies. Capitalists cannot act as mere dividend collectors, leaving initiative to state officials to attend to the exploitation of the working class. Capitalists struggle among themselves for profits and for the control of the state in order to protect their sectional interests and their field of action extends beyond the limits of the state. Although during the present crisis a strong concentration took place within each capitalist nation, there still remains powerful international interlacements (of big capital). In the form of the struggle between nations, the struggle of capitalists continues, whereby a severe political crisis in war and defeat has the effect of an economic crisis.

When, therefore, the question arises whether or not state capitalism – in the sense in which it has been used above – is a necessary intermediate stage before the proletariat seizes power, whether it would be the highest and last form of capitalism established by the bourgeoisie, the answer is No. On the other hand, if by state capitalism one means the strict control and regulation of private capital by the state, the answer is Yes, the degree of state control varying within a country according to time and conditions, the preservation and increase of profits brought about in different ways, depending upon the historical and political conditions and the relationship of the classes.

II

The goal of the working class is liberation from exploitation. This goal is not reached and cannot be reached by a new directing and governing class substituting the bourgeoisie. It can only be realised by the workers themselves being master over production.

Nevertheless it is possible and quite probable that state capitalism will be an intermediary stage, until the proletariat succeeds in establishing communism. This, however, could not happen for economic but for political reasons. State capitalism would not be the result of economic crises but of the class struggle. In the final stage of capitalism, the class struggle is the most significant force that determines the actions of the bourgeoisie and shapes state economy.

It is to be expected that, as a result of great economic tension and conflict, the class struggle of the future proletariat will flare up into mass action; whether this mass action be the came of wage conflicts wars or economic crises, whether the shape it takes be that of mass strikes, street riots or armed struggle; the proletariat will establish council organizations – organs of self-determination and uniform execution of action. This will particularly be the case in Germany. There the old political organs of the class struggle have been destroyed; workers stand side by side as individuals with no other allegiance but to that of their class. Should far-reaching political movements develop in Germany, the workers could function only as a class, fight only as a class when they oppose the capitalist principle of one-man dictatorship with the proletarian principle of self-determination of the

masses. In other parliamentary countries, on the other hand, the workers are severely handicapped in their development of independent class action by the activities of the political parties. These parties promise the working class safer fighting methods, force upon the workers their leadership and make the majority of the population their unthinking followers, with the aid of their propaganda machinery. In Germany these handicaps are a dying tradition.

Such primary mass struggles are only the beginning of a period of revolutionary development. Let us assume a situation favorable to the proletariat; that proletarian action is so powerful as to paralyze and overthrow the bourgeois state. In spite of unanimous action in this respect, the degree of maturity of the masses may vary. A clear conception of aims, ways and means will be acquired only during the process of revolution and after the first victory differences as to further tactics will assert themselves. Socialist or communist party spokesmen appear; they are not dead, at least their ideas are alive among the "moderate" section of the workers. Now their time has come to put into practice their program of "state socialism."

The most progressive workers whose aim must be to put the leadership of the struggle into the control of the working class by means of the council organization, (thereby weakening the enemy power of the state force) will be encountered by "socialist" propaganda in which will be stressed the necessity of speedily building the socialist order by means of a "socialistic" government. There will be warnings against extreme demands, appeals to the timidity of those individuals to whom the thought of proletarian communism is yet inconceivable, compromises with bourgeois reformists will be advised, as well as the buying-out of the bourgeoisie rather than forcing it thru expropriation to embittered resistance. Attempts will be made to hold back the workers from revolutionary aims – from the determined class struggle. Around this type of propaganda will rally those who feel called upon to be at the head of the party or to assume leadership among the workers. Among these leaders will be a great portion of the intelligentsia who easily adapt themselves to "state socialism" but not to council communism and other sections of the bourgeoisie who see in the workers' struggles a new class position from which they can successfully combat communism. "Socialism against anarchy," such will be the battle cry of those who will want to save of capitalism what there can be saved.

The outcome of this struggle depends on the maturity of the revolutionary working class. Those who now believe that all one has to do is to wait for revolutionary action, because then economic necessity will teach the workers how to act correctly, are victims of an illusion. Certainly workers will learn quickly and act forcefully in revolutionary times. Meanwhile heavy defeats are likely to be experienced, resulting in the loss of countless victims. The more thorough the work of enlightenment of the proletariat, the more firm will be the attack of the masses against the attempt of "leaders" to direct their actions into the channels of state socialism. Considering the difficulties with which the task of enlightenment now encounters, it seems improbable that there lies open for the workers a road to freedom without setbacks. In this situation are to be found the possibilities for state capitalism as an intermediary stage before the coming of communism.

Thus the capitalist class will not adopt state capitalism because of its own economic difficulties. Monopoly capitalism, particularly when using the state as a fascist dictatorship, can secure for itself most of the advantages of a single organization without giving up its own rule over production. There will be a different situation, however, when it feels itself so far pressed by the working class that the old form of private capitalism can no longer be saved. Then state capitalism will be the way out: the preservation of exploitation in the form of a "socialistic" society, where the "most capable leaders," the "best brains," and the "great men of action" will direct production and the masses will work obediently under their command. Whether or not this condition is called state capitalism or state socialism makes no difference in principle. Whether one refers to the first term "State capitalism"

as being a ruling and exploiting state bureaucracy or to the second term "State socialism" as a necessary staff of officials who as dutiful and obedient servants of the community share the work with the laborers, the difference in the final analysis lies in the amount of the salaries and the qualitative measure of influence in the party connections.

Such a form of society cannot be stable, it is a form of retrogression, against which the working class will again rise. Under it a certain amount of order can be brought about but production remains restricted. Social development remains hindered. Russia was able, through this form of organization, to change from semi-barbarism to a developed capitalism, to surpass even the achievements of the Western countries' private capitalism. In this process figures the enthusiasm apparent among the "upstart" bourgeois classes, wherever capitalism begins its course. But such state capitalism cannot progress. In Western Europe and in America the same form of economic organization would not be progressive, since it would hinder the coming of communism. It would obstruct the necessary revolution in production; that is, it would be reactionary in character and assume the political form of a dictatorship.

III

Some Marxists maintain that Marx and Engels foresaw this development of society to state capitalism. But we know of no statement by Marx concerning state capitalism from which we could deduce that he looked upon the state when it assumes the role of sole capitalist, as being the last phase of capitalist society. He saw in the state the organ of suppression, which bourgeois society uses against the working class. For Engels "The Proletariat seizes the power of the state and then changes the ownership of the means of production to state ownership."

This means that the change of ownership to state ownership did not occur previously. Any attempt to make this sentence of Engels' responsible for the theory of state capitalism, brings Engels into contradiction with himself. Also, there is no confirmation of it to be found in actual occurrences. The railroads in highly developed capitalist countries, like England and America, are still in the private possession of capitalistic corporations. Only the postal and telegraphic services are owned by the states in most countries, but for other reasons than their high state of development. The German railroads were owned by the state mostly for military reasons. The only state capitalism which was enabled to transfer the means of production to state ownership is the Russian, but not on account of their state of high development, rather on account of their low degree of development. There is nothing, however, to be found in Engels which could be applied to conditions as they exist in Germany and Italy today, these are strong supervision regulation, and limitation of liberty of private capitalism by an all-powerful state.

This is quite natural, as Engels was no prophet; he was only a scientist who was well aware of the process of social development. What he expounds are the fundamental tendencies in this development and their significance. Theories of development are best expressed when spoken of in connection with the future; it is therefore not harmful to use caution in expressing them. Less cautious expression, as is often the case with Engels, does not diminish the value of the prognostications in the least, although occurrences do not exactly correspond to predictions. A man of his calibre has a right to expect that even his suppositions be treated with care, although they were arrived at under certain definite conditions. The work of deducing the tendencies of capitalism and their development, and shaping them into consistent and comprehensive theories assures to Marx and Engels a prominent position among the most outstanding thinkers and scientists of the nineteenth century, but the exact description of the social structure of half a century in advance in all its

details was an impossibility even for them.

Dictatorships, as those in Italy and Germany, became necessary as means of coercion to force upon the unwilling mass of small capitalists the new order and the regulating limitations. For this reason such dictatorship is often looked upon as the future political form of society of a developed capitalism the world over.

During forty years the socialist press pointed out that military monarchy was the political form of society belonging to a concentrated capitalistic society. For the bourgeois is in need of a Kaiser, the Junkers and the army in defense against a revolutionary working class on one side and the neighboring countries on the other side. For ten years the belief prevailed that the republic was the true form of government for a developed capitalism, because under this form of state the bourgeoisie were the masters. Now the dictatorship is considered to be the needed form of government. Whatever the form may be, the most fitting reasons for it are always found. While at the same time countries like England, France, America and Belgium with a highly concentrated and developed capitalism, retain the same form of parliamentary government, be it under a republic or kingdom. This proves that capitalism chooses many roads leading to the same destination, and it also proves that there should be no haste in drawing conclusions from the experiences in one country to apply to the world at large.

In every country great capital accomplishes its rule by means of the existing political institutions, developed thru history and traditions, whose functions are then being changed expressly. England offers an instance. There the parliamentary system in conjunction with a high measure of personal liberty and autonomy are so successful that there is no trace whatever of socialism, communism or revolutionary thought among the working classes. There also monopolistic capitalism grew and developed. There, too, capitalism dominates the government. There, too, the government takes measures to overcome the results of the depression, but they manage to succeed without the aid of a dictatorship. This does not make England a democracy, because already a half a century ago two aristocratic cliques of politicians held the government alternately, and the same conditions prevail today. But they are ruling by different means; in the long run these means may be more effective than the brutal dictatorship. Compared with Germany, the even and forceful rule of English capitalism looks to be the more normal one. In Germany the pressure of a police-government forced the workers into radical movements, subsequently the workers obtained external political power, not thru the efforts of a great inner force within themselves, but thru the military debacle of their rulers, and eventually they saw that power destroyed by a sharp dictatorship, the result of a petty bourgeois revolution which was financed by monopolistic capital. This should not be interpreted to mean that the English form of government is really the normal one, and the German the abnormal one; just as it would be wrong to assume the reverse. Each case must be judged separately, each country has the kind of government which grew out of its own course of political development.

Observing America, we find in this land of greatest concentration of monopolistic capital as little desire to change to a dictatorship as we find in England. Under the Roosevelt administration certain regulations and actions were effected in order to relieve the results of the depression, some were complete innovations. Among these there was also the beginning of a social policy, which was hitherto entirely absent from American politics. But private capital is already rebelling and is already feeling strong enough to pursue its own course in the political struggle for power. Seen from America, the dictatorships in several European countries appear like a heavy armour, destructive of liberty, which the closely pressed-in nations of Europe must bear, because inherited feuds whip them on to mutual destruction, but not as what they really are, purposeful forms of organization of a most highly developed capitalism.

The arguments for a new labor movement, which we designate with the name of Council-Communism, do not find their basis in state capitalism and fascist dictatorship. This movement represents a vital need of the working classes and is bound to develop everywhere. It becomes a necessity because of the colossal rise of the power of capital, because against a power of this magnitude the old forms of labor movement become powerless, therefore labor must find new means of combat. For this reason any program principles for the new labor movement can be based on neither state capitalism, fascism, nor dictatorship as their causes, but only the constantly growing power of capital and the impotence of the old labor movement to cope with this power.

For the working classes in fascist countries both conditions prevail, for there the risen power of capital is the power holding the political as well as the economic dictatorship of the country. When there the propaganda for new forms of action connects with the existence of the dictatorship, it is as it should be. But it would be folly to base an international program on such principles forgetting that conditions in other countries differ widely from those in fascist countries.

9.3 Anton Pannekoek, *The Failure of the Working Class* (1946)

In former issues of *Politics* the problem has been posed: Why did the working class fail in its historical task? Why did it not offer resistance to national socialism in Germany? Why is there no trace of any revolutionary movement amongst the workers of America? What has happened to the social vitality of the world working class? Why do the masses all over the globe no longer seem capable of initiating anything new aimed at their own self-liberation? Some light may be thrown upon this problem by the following considerations.

It is easy to ask: why did not the workers rise against threatening fascism? To fight you must have a positive aim. Opposed to fascism there were two alternatives: either to maintain, or to return to the old capitalism, with its unemployment, its crises, its corruption, its misery – whereas National Socialism preserved itself as an anti-capitalist reign of labor, without unemployment, a reign of national greatness, of community politics that could lead to a socialist revolution. Thus, indeed, the deeper question is: why did the German workers not make their revolution?

Well, they had experienced a revolution: 1918. But it had taught them the lesson that neither the Social Democratic Party, nor the trade unions was the instrument of their liberation; both turned out to be instruments for restoring capitalism. So what were they to do? The Communist Party did not show a way either; it propagated the Russian system of state-capitalism, with its still worse lack of freedom.

Could it have been otherwise? The avowed aim of the Socialist Party in Germany – and then in all countries – was state socialism. According to program the working class had to conquer political dominance, and then by its power over the state, had to organize production into a state-directed planned economic system. Its instrument was to be the Socialist Party, developed already into a huge body of 300,000 members, with a million trade-union members and three million voters behind them, led by a big apparatus of politicians, agitators, editors, eager to take the place of the former rulers. According to program, then, they should expropriate by law the capitalist class and organize production in a centrally-directed planned system.

It is clear that in such a system the workers, though their daily bread may seem to be secured, are only imperfectly liberated. The upper echelons of society have been changed, but the foundations bearing the entire building remain the old ones: factories with wage-earning workers under the

command of directors and managers. So we find it described by the English socialist G.D.H. Cole, who after World War 1 strongly influenced the trade unions by his studies of guild socialism and other reforms of the industrial system. He says:

“The whole people would no more be able than the whole body of shareholders in a great enterprise to manage an industry... It would be necessary, under socialism as much as under large scale capitalism, to entrust the actual management of industrial enterprise to salaried experts, chosen for their specialized knowledge and ability in particular branches of work... There is no reason to suppose that the methods of appointing the actual managers in socialized industries would differ widely from those already in force in large scale capitalist enterprise... There is no reason to suppose that the socialization of any industry would mean a great change in its managerial personnel.”

Thus the workers will have got new masters instead of the old ones. Good humane masters instead of the bad, rapacious masters of today. Appointed by a socialist government or at best chosen by themselves. But, once chosen, they must be obeyed. The workers are not master over their shops, they are not master of the means of production. Above them stands the commanding power of a state bureaucracy of leaders and managers. Such a state of affairs can attract the workers as long as they feel powerless against the power of the capitalists: so in their first rise during the 19th century this was put up as the goal. They were not strong enough to drive the capitalists out of the command over the production installations; so their way out was state socialism, a government of socialists expropriating the capitalists.

Now that the workers begin to realize that state socialism means new fetters, they stand before the difficult task of finding and opening new roads. This is not possible without a deep revolution of ideas, accompanied by much internal strife. No wonder that the vigor of the fight slackens, that they hesitate, divided and uncertain, and seem to have lost their energy.

Capitalism, indeed, cannot be annihilated by a change in the commanding persons; but only by the abolition of commanding. The real freedom of the workers consists in their direct mastery over the means of production. The essence of the future free world community is not that the working masses get enough food, but they direct their work themselves, collectively. For the real content of their life is their productive work; the fundamental change is not a change in the passive realm of consumption, but in the active realm of production. Before them now the problem arises of how to unite freedom and organization; how to combine mastery of the workers over the work with the binding up of all this work into a well-planned social entirety. How to organize production, in every shop as well as over the whole of world economy, in such a way that they themselves as parts of a collaborating community regulate their work. Mastery over production means that the personnel, the bodies of workers, technicians and experts that by their collective effort run the shop and put into action the technical apparatus are at the same time the managers themselves. The organization into a social entity is then performed by delegates of the separate plants, by so-called workers councils, discussing and deciding on the common affairs. The development of such a council organization will afford the solution of the problem; but this development is a historical process, taking time and demanding a deep transformation of outlook and character.

This new vision of a free communism is only beginning to take hold of the minds of the workers. And so now we begin to understand why former promising workers' movements could not succeed. When the aims are too narrow there can be no real liberation. When the aim is a semi- or mock-liberation, the inner forces aroused are insufficient to bring about fundamental results. So the German socialist movement, unable to provide the workers with arms powerful enough to fight successfully monopolistic capital, had to succumb. The working class had to search for new roads. But the difficulty of disentangling itself from the net of socialist teachings imposed by old parties

and old slogans made it powerless against aggressive capitalism, and brought about a period of continuous decline, indicating the need for a new orientation.

Thus what is called the failure of the working class is the failure of its narrow socialist aims. The real fight for liberation has yet to begin; what is known as the workers' movement in the century behind us, seen in this way, was only a series of skirmishes of advance guards. Intellectuals, who are wont to reduce the social struggle to the most abstract and simple formulas, are inclined to underrate the tremendous scope of the social transformation before us. They think how easy it would be to put the right name into the ballot box. They forget what deep inner revolution must take place in the working masses; what amount of clear insight, of solidarity, of perseverance and courage, of proud fighting spirit is needed to vanquish the immense physical and spiritual power of capitalism.

The workers of the world nowadays have two mighty foes, two hostile and suppressing powers over against them: the monopolistic capitalism of America and England, and Russian state capitalism. The former is drifting toward social dictatorship camouflaged in democratic forms; the latter proclaims dictatorship openly, formerly with the addition "of the proletariat," although nobody believes that any more. They both try to keep the workers in a state of obedient well-drilled followers, acting only at the command of the party leaders, the former by the aid of the socialist program of socialist parties, the latter by the slogans and wily tricks of the Communist party. The tradition of glorious struggle helps keep them spiritually dependent on obsolete ideas. In the competition for world domination, each tries to keep the workers in its fold, by shouting against capitalism here, against dictatorship there.

In the awakening resistance to both, the workers are beginning to perceive that they can fight successfully only by adhering to and proclaiming the exactly opposite principle – the principle of devoted collaboration of free and equal personalities. Theirs is the task of finding out the way in which the principle can be carried out in their practical action.

The paramount question here is whether there are indications of an existing or awakening fighting spirit in the working class. So we must leave the field of political party strife, now chiefly intended to fool the masses, and turn to the field of economic interests, where the workers intuitively fight their bitter struggle for living conditions. Here we see that with the development of small business into big business, the trade unions cease to be instruments of the workers' struggle. In modern times these organizations ever more turn into the organs by which monopoly capital dictates its terms to the working class.

When the workers begin to realize that the trade unions cannot direct their fight against capital they face the task of finding and practicing new forms of struggle. These new forms are the wildcat strikes. Here they shake off direction by the old leaders and the old organizations; here they take the initiative in their own hands; here they have to think out time and ways, to take the decisions, to do all the work of propaganda, of extension, of directing their actions themselves. Wildcat strikes are spontaneous outbursts, the genuine practical expression of class struggle against capitalism, though without wider aims as yet; but they embody a new character already in the rebellious masses: self-determination instead of determination by leaders, self-reliance instead of obedience, fighting spirit instead of accepting the dictates from above, unbreakable solidarity and unity with the comrades instead of duty imposed by membership. The unit in action and strike is, of course, the same as the unit of daily productive work, the personnel of the shop, the plant, the docks; it is the common work, the common interest against the common capitalist master that compels them to act as one. In these discussions and decisions all the individual capabilities, all the forces of character and mind of all the workers, exalted and strained to the utmost, are co-operating towards the common goal.

In the wildcat strikes we may see the beginnings of a new practical orientation of the working class, a new tactic, the method of direct action. They represent the only actual rebellion of man against the deadening suppressing weight of world-dominating capital. Surely, on small scale such strikes mostly have to be broken off without success – warning signs only. Their efficiency depends on their extension over larger masses; only fear for such indefinite extension can compel capital to make concessions. If the pressure by capitalist exploitation grows heavier – and we may be sure it will – resistance will be aroused ever anew and will involve ever larger masses. When the strikes take on such dimensions as to disturb seriously the social order, when they assail capitalism in its inner essence, the mastery of the shops, the workers will have to confront state power with all its resources. Then their strikes must assume a political character; they have to broaden their social outlook; their strike committees, embodying their class community, assume wider social functions, taking the character of workers' councils. Then the social revolution, the breakdown of capitalism, comes into view.

Is there any reason to expect such a revolutionary development in coming times, through conditions that were lacking until now? It seems that we can, with some probability, indicate such conditions. In Marx's writings we find the sentence: a production system does not perish before all its innate possibilities have developed. In the persistence of capitalism, we now begin to detect some deeper truth in this sentence than was suspected before. As long as the capitalist system can keep the masses alive, they feel no stringent necessity to do away with it. And it is able to do so as long as it can grow and expand its realm over wider parts of the world. Hence, so long as half the world's population stands outside capitalism, its task is not finished. The many hundreds of millions thronged in the fertile plains of Eastern and Southern Asia are still living in pre-capitalist conditions. As long as they can afford a market to be provided with rails and locomotives, with trucks, machines and factories, capitalist enterprise, especially in America, may prosper and expand. And henceforth it is on the working class of America that world-revolution depends.

This means that the necessity of revolutionary struggle will impose itself once capitalism engulfs the bulk of mankind, once a further significant expansion is hampered. The threat of wholesale destruction in this last phase of capitalism makes this fight a necessity for all the producing classes of society, the farmers and intellectuals as well as the workers. What is condensed here in these short sentences is an extremely complicated historical process filing a period of revolution, prepared and accompanied by spiritual fights and fundamental changes in basic ideas. These developments should be carefully studied by all those to whom communism without dictatorship, social organization on the basis of community-minded freedom, represents the future of mankind.

9.4 Karl Korsch, *The Fascist Counter-revolution* (1940)

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II

The main deficiency of the Marxian concept of the counterrevolution is that Marx did not, and from the viewpoint of his historical experience could not, conceive of the counterrevolution as a normal phase of social development. Like the bourgeois liberals he thought of the counterrevolution as an "abnormal" temporary disturbance of a normally progressive development. (In the same manner, pacifists to the present day think of war as an abnormal interruption of the normal state of peace, and physicians and psychiatrists until recently thought of disease and more especially

the diseases of the mind as an abnormal state of the organism.) There is, however, between the Marxian approach and that of the typical bourgeois liberal this important difference: they start from a totally different idea about just what is a normal condition. The bourgeois liberal regards existing conditions or at least their basic features as the normal state of things, and any radical change as its abnormal interruption. It does not matter to him whether that disturbance of existing normal conditions results from a genuinely progressive movement or from a reactionary attempt to borrow revolution's thunder for the purpose of a counterrevolutionary aggression. He is afraid of the counterrevolution just as much as of the revolution and just because of its resemblance to a genuine revolution. That is why Guizot called the coup d'état "the complete and final triumph of the socialist revolution" and why, for that matter, Hermann Rauschnig today describes the advent of Hitlerism as a "revolt of nihilism."

As against the bourgeois concept, the Marxian theory has a distinct superiority. It understands revolution as a completely normal process. Some of the best Marxists, including Marx himself and Lenin, even said on occasion that revolution is the only normal state of society. So it is, indeed, under those objective historical conditions which are soberly stated by Marx in his preface to the "Critique of Political Economy."

Marx did not, however, apply the same objective and historical principle to the process of counterrevolution, which was known to him only in an undeveloped form. Thus, he did not see, and most people do not see today, that such important counterrevolutionary developments as those of present-day fascism and nazism have, in spite of their violent revolutionary methods, much more in common with evolution than they have with a genuine revolutionary process. It is true that in their talk and propaganda both Hitler and Mussolini have directed their attack mostly against revolutionary Marxism and communism. It is also true that before and after their seizure of state power they made a most violent attempt to weed out every Marxist and Communist tendency in the working classes. Yet this was not the main content of the fascist counterrevolution. In its actual results the fascist attempt to renovate and transform the traditional state of society does not offer an alternative to the radical solution aimed at by the revolutionary Communists. The fascist counterrevolution rather tried to replace the reformist socialist parties and trade unions, and in this it succeeded to a great extent.

The underlying historical law, *the law of the fully developed fascist counterrevolution of our time*, can be formulated in the following manner: After the complete exhaustion and defeat of the revolutionary forces, the fascist counterrevolution attempts to fulfil, by new revolutionary methods and in widely different form, those social and political tasks which the so-called reformist parties and trade unions had promised to achieve but in which they could no longer succeed under the given historical conditions.

A revolution does not occur at some arbitrary point of social development but only at a definite stage. "At a certain stage of their development the material productive forces of society come into contradiction with the existing production-relations (or property-relations) within which they hitherto moved. From being forms of development, those relations turn into fetters upon the forces of production. *Then a period of social revolution sets in.*" And again Marx emphasized, and even to a certain extent exaggerated, the objectivistic principle of his materialist theory of revolution according to which "a formation of society never perishes until all the forces of production for which it is wide enough have been developed." All this is true enough as far as it goes. We have all seen how evolutionary socialism reached the end of its rope. We have seen how the old capitalistic system based on free competition and the whole of its vast political and ideological superstructure was faced by chronic depression and decay. There seemed no way open except a wholesale transition

to another, more highly developed form of society, to be effected by the social revolution of the proletarian class.

The new historical development during the last twenty years showed, however, that there was yet another course open. The transition to a new type of capitalistic society, that could no longer be achieved by the democratic and peaceful means of traditional socialism and trade unionism, was performed by a counterrevolutionary and anti-proletarian yet objectively progressive and ideologically anti-capitalistic and plebeian movement that had learned to apply to its restricted evolutionary aims the unrestricted methods developed during the preceding revolution. (More particularly, both Hitler and Mussolini had learned much in the school of Russian Bolshevism.) Thus, it appeared that the evolution of capitalistic society had not reached its utter historical limit when the ruling classes and the reformistic socialists – those self-appointed “doctors at the sickbed of capitalism” – reached the limits of their evolutionary possibilities. The phase of peaceful democratic reforms was followed by another evolutionary phase of development – that of the fascist transformation, revolutionary in its political form but evolutionary in its objective social contents.

The decisive reason that the capitalistic formation of society did not perish after the collapse of the First World War is that the workers did not make their revolution. “Fascism,” said its closest enemy, “is a counterrevolution against a revolution that never took place.” Capitalistic society did not perish, but instead entered a new revolutionary phase under the counterrevolutionary regime of fascism, because it was not destroyed by a successful workers’ revolution, and because it had not, in fact, developed all the forces of production. The objective and the subjective premises are equally important for the counterrevolutionary conclusion.

From this viewpoint all those comfortable illusions about a hidden revolutionary significance in the temporary victory of the counterrevolution, in which the earlier Marxists so frequently indulged, must be entirely abandoned. If counterrevolution is only extremely and superficially connected with a social revolution by its procedures, but in its actual content is much more closely related to the further evolution of a given social system, and is in fact a particular historical phase of that social evolution, then it can no longer be regarded as a revolution in disguise. There is no reason to hail it either as an immediate prelude to the genuine revolution, or as an intrinsic phase of the revolutionary process itself. It appears as a particular phase of the whole developmental process, not inevitable like revolution yet becoming an inevitable step within the development of a given society under certain historical conditions. It has reached its up-to-now most comprehensive and important form in the present day fascist renovation and transformation of Europe, which in its basic economic aspect appears as a transition from the private and anarchic form of competitive capitalism to a system of planned and organized monopoly capitalism or state capitalism.

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9.5 Gilles Dauvé, *When Insurrections Die* (1979)

Not “Fascism Or Democracy” – Fascism And Democracy

According to current left-wing wisdom, fascism is raw state power and brutal capital unmasked, so the only way to do away with fascism is to get rid of capitalism altogether.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, the analysis usually turns round on itself: since fascism is capitalism at its worst, we ought to prevent it from actually producing its worst, i.e. we ought to fight for a “normal”, non-fascist capitalism, and even rally non-fascist capitalists.

Moreover, as fascism is capital in its most reactionary forms, such a vision means trying to

promote capital in its most modern, non-feudal, non-militarist, non-racist, non-repressive, non-reactionary forms, i.e. a more liberal capitalism, in other words a more capitalist capitalism.

While it goes on at length to explain how fascism serves the interests of “big business”, anti-fascism maintains that fascism could have been averted in 1922 or 1933 anyway, that is without destroying big business, if the workers’ movement and/or the democrats had mounted enough pressure to bar Mussolini and Hitler from power. Anti-fascism is an endless comedy of sorrows: if only, in 1921, the Italian Socialist Party and the newly-founded Italian Communist Party had allied with Republican forces to stop Mussolini... if only, at the beginning of the 1930’s, the KPD had not launched a fratricidal struggle against the SPD, Europe would have been spared one of the most ferocious dictatorships in history, a second world war, a Nazi empire of almost continental dimensions, the concentration camps, and the extermination of the Jews. Above and beyond its very true observations about classes, the state, and the ties between fascism and big industry, this vision fails to see that fascism arose out of a two-fold failure: the failure of revolutionaries after World War I, crushed as they were by social-democracy and parliamentary democracy, and then, in the course of the 1920’s, the failure of the democrats and social-democrats in managing capital. Without a grasp of the preceding period as well as of the earlier phase of class struggle and its limits, the coming to power, and still more the nature of fascism, remain incomprehensible.

What is the real thrust of fascism, if not the economic and political unification of capital, a tendency which has become general since 1914? Fascism was a particular way of bringing about that unity in countries – Italy and Germany – where, even though the revolution had been snuffed out, the state was unable to impose order, including order in the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Mussolini was no Thiers, with a solid base in power, ordering regular forces to massacre the Communards. An essential aspect of fascism is its birth in the streets, its use of disorder to impose order, its mobilisation of the old middle classes crazed by their own decline, and its regeneration, from without, of a state unable to deal with the crisis of capitalism. Fascism was an effort of the bourgeoisie to forcibly tame its own contradictions, to turn working class methods of mobilisation to its own advantage, and to deploy all the resources of the modern state, first against an internal enemy, then against an external one.

This was indeed a crisis of the state, during the transition to the total domination of capital over society. First, workers’ organisations had been necessary to deal with the proletarian upsurge; then, fascism was required to put an end to the ensuing disorder. This disorder was, of course, not revolutionary, but it was paralysing, and stood in the way of solutions which, as a result, could only be violent. This crisis was only erratically overcome at the time: the fascist state was efficient only in appearance, because it forcibly integrated the wage-labour work force, and artificially buried conflicts by projecting them into militarist adventure. But the crisis was overcome, relatively, by the multi-tentacled democratic state established in 1945, which potentially appropriated all of fascism’s methods, and added some of its own, since it neutralises wage-worker organisations without destroying them. Parliaments have lost control over the executive. With welfare or with workfare, by modern techniques of surveillance or by state assistance extended to millions of individuals, in short by a system which makes everyone more and more dependent, social unification goes beyond anything achieved by fascist terror, but fascism as a specific movement has disappeared. It corresponded to the forced-march discipline of the bourgeoisie, under the pressure of the state, in the particular context of newly created states hard-pressed to constitute themselves as nations.

The bourgeoisie even took the word “fascism” from working class organisations in Italy, which were often called *fasci*. It is significant that fascism first defined itself as a form of organisation and not as a programme. The word referred both to a symbol of state power (*fasces*, or bundles, borne

before high officials in Ancient Rome), and to a will to get people together in bundles (groups). Fascism's only programme is to organise, to forcibly make the components of society converge.

Dictatorship is not a weapon of capital (as if capital could replace it with other, less brutal weapons): dictatorship is one of its tendencies, a tendency realised whenever it is deemed necessary. A "return" to parliamentary democracy, as it occurred in Germany after 1945, indicates that dictatorship is useless for integrating the masses into the state (at least until the next time). The problem is therefore not that democracy ensures a more pliant domination than dictatorship: anyone would prefer being exploited in the Swedish mode to being abducted by the henchmen of Pinochet. But does one have the choice? Even the gentle democracy of Scandinavia would be turned into a dictatorship if circumstances demanded it. The state can only have one function, which it fulfils democratically or dictatorially. The fact that the former is less harsh does not mean that it is possible to reorient the state to dispense with the latter. Capitalism's forms depend no more on the preferences of wage workers than they do on the intentions of the bourgeoisie. Weimar capitulated to Hitler with open arms. Léon Blum's Popular Front did not "avoid fascism", because in 1936 France required neither an authoritarian unification of capital nor a shrinking of its middle classes.

There is no political "choice" to which proletarians could be enticed or which could be forcibly imposed. Democracy is not dictatorship, but democracy does prepare dictatorship, and prepares itself for dictatorship.

The essence of anti-fascism consists in resisting fascism by defending democracy: one no longer struggles against capitalism but seeks to pressure capitalism into renouncing the totalitarian option. Since socialism is identified with total democracy, and capitalism with an accelerating tendency to fascism, the antagonisms between proletariat and capital, communism and wage-labour, proletariat and state, are rejected for a counter-position of democracy and fascism presented as the quintessential revolutionary perspective. The official left and far left tell us that a real change would be the realisation, at last, of the ideals of 1789, endlessly betrayed by the bourgeoisie. The new world? Why, it is already here, to some extent, in embryos to be preserved, in little buds to be tended: already existing democratic rights must be pushed further and further within an infinitely perfectible society, with ever-greater daily doses of democracy, until the achievement of complete democracy, or socialism.

Thus reduced to anti-fascist resistance, social critique is enlisted in dithyrambs to everything it once denounced, and gives up nothing less than that shop-worn affair, revolution, for gradualism, a variant on the "peaceful transition to socialism" once advocated by the CPs, and derided, thirty years ago, by anyone serious about changing the world. The retrogression is palpable.

We won't invite ridicule by accusing the left and far left of having discarded a communist perspective which they knew in reality only when opposing it. It is all too obvious that anti-fascism renounces revolution. But anti-fascism fails exactly where its realism claims to be effective: in preventing a possible dictatorial mutation of society.

Bourgeois democracy is a phase in capital's seizure of power, and its extension in the 20th century completes capital's domination by intensifying the isolation of individuals. Proposed as a remedy for the separation between man and community, between human activity and society, and between classes, democracy will never be able to solve the problem of the most separated society in history. As a form forever incapable of modifying its content, democracy is only a part of the problem to which it claims to be the solution. Each time it claims to strengthen the "social bond", democracy contributes to its dissolution. Each time it papers over the contradictions of the commodity, it does so by tightening the hold of the net which the state has placed over social relations.

Even in their own desperately resigned terms, the anti-fascists, to be credible, have to explain

to us how local democracy is compatible with the colonisation of the commodity which empties out public space, and fills up the shopping malls. They have to explain how an omnipresent state to which people turn for protection and help, this veritable machine for producing social “good”, will not commit “evil” when explosive contradictions require it to restore order. Fascism is the adulation of the statist monster, while anti-fascism is its more subtle apology. The fight for a democratic state is inevitably a fight to consolidate the state, and far from crippling totalitarianism, such a fight increases totalitarianism’s stranglehold on society.

Rome: 1919-1922

Fascism triumphed in countries in which the revolutionary assault after World War I matured into a series of armed insurrections. In Italy, an important part of the proletariat, using its own methods and goals, directly confronted fascism. There was nothing specifically anti-fascist about its struggle: fighting capital compelled workers and the young CP (created at Livorno, January 1921, and led by the “Bordigist” faction) to fight both the Black Shirts and the cops of parliamentary democracy.

Fascism is unique in giving counter-revolution a mass base and in mimicking revolution. Fascism turns the call to “transform the imperialist war into civil war” against the workers’ movement, and it appears as a reaction of demobilised veterans returning to civilian life, where they are nothing, only held together by collective violence, and bent on destroying everything they imagine to be a cause of their dispossession: subversives, enemies of the nation, etc. In July 1918, Mussolini’s paper, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, added to its title “Veterans’ and Producers’ Daily”.

Thus from the outset fascism became an auxiliary of the police in rural areas, putting down the agricultural proletariat with bullets, but at the same time developing a frenzied anti-capitalist demagoguery. In 1919, it represented nothing: in Milan, in the November general election, it got less than 5000 votes, while the socialists got 170,000. Yet it demanded the abolition of the monarchy, of the senate and all titles of nobility, the vote for women, the confiscation of the property of the clergy, and the expropriation of the big landowners and industrialists. Fighting against the worker in the name of the “producer”, Mussolini exalted the memory of the Red Week of 1914 (which had seen a wave of riots, particularly in Ancona and Naples), and hailed the positive role of unions in linking the worker to the nation. Fascism’s goal was the authoritarian restoration of the state, in order to create a new state structure capable (in contrast to democracy, Mussolini said) of limiting big capital and of controlling the commodity logic which was eroding values, social ties and work.

For decades, the bourgeoisie had denied the reality of social contradictions. Fascism, on the contrary, proclaimed them with violence, denying their existence between classes and transposing them to the struggle between nations, denouncing Italy’s fate as a “proletarian nation”. Mussolini was archaic in so far as he upheld traditional values ruined by capital, and modern in so far as he claimed to defend the social rights of the people.

Fascist repression was unleashed after a proletarian failure engineered mainly by democracy and its main fallback options: the parties and unions, which alone can defeat the workers by employing direct and indirect methods in tandem. Fascism’s arrival in power was not the culmination of street battles. Italian and German proles had been crushed before, by both ballots and bullets.

In 1919, federating pre-existing elements with others close to him, Mussolini founded his fasci. To counter clubs and revolvers, while Italy was exploding along with the rest of Europe, democracy called for... a vote, from which a moderate and socialist majority emerged. Forty years after these events Bordiga commented:

“Enthusiastic involvement in the 1919 electoral celebration was tantamount to removing

all obstacles on the path of fascism, which was shooting ahead while the masses were put to sleep as they waited for the big parliamentary showdown... Victory, the election of 150 socialist MPs, was won at the cost of the ebb of the insurrectionary movement and of the general political strike, and the rollback of the gains that had already been won.”

At the time of the factory occupations of 1920, the state, holding back from a head-on-assault, allowed the proletariat to exhaust itself, with the support of the CGL (a majority-socialist union), which wore down the strikes when it did not break them openly. The institutionalisation of “workers’ control” over the factories, under state supervision, was approved by bosses and unions alike.

As soon as the *fasci* appeared, sacking the *Case di Popolo*, the police either turned a blind eye or confiscated the workers’ guns. The courts showed the *fasci* the greatest indulgence, and the army tolerated their exactions when it did not actually assist them. This open but unofficial support became quasi-official with the “Bonomi circular”. After being expelled from the socialist party in 1912, with Mussolini’s agreement, for supporting Italy’s war against Libya, Ivanoe Bonomi held several ministerial posts, and was head of government in 1921-22. His October 20, 1921 circular provided 60,000 demobilised officers to take command of Mussolini’s assault groups.

Meanwhile, what were the parties doing? Those liberals allied with the right did not hesitate to form a “national bloc”, including the fascists, for the elections of May 1921. In June-July of the same year, confronting an adversary without the slightest scruple, the PSI concluded a meaningless “pacification pact” whose only concrete effect was to further disorient the workers.

Faced with an obvious political reaction, the CGL declared itself a-political. Sensing that Mussolini had power within his grasp, the union leaders dreamed of a tacit agreement of mutual tolerance with the fascists, and called on the proletariat to stay out of the face-off between the CP and the National Fascist Party.

Until August 1922, fascism rarely existed outside the agrarian regions, mainly in the north, where it eradicated all traces of autonomous agrarian worker unionism. In 1919, fascists did burn the headquarters of the socialist daily paper, but they held back from any role as strike-breakers in 1920, and even gave verbal support to worker demands: Mussolini took great pains to stand behind the strikers and dissociate himself from troublemakers, i.e. communists. In the urban areas, the *fasci* were rarely dominant. Their “March on Ravenna” (September 1921) was easily routed. In Rome in November 1921 a general strike prevented a fascist congress from taking place. In May 1922 the fascists tried again, and were stopped again.

The scenario varied little. A localised fascist onslaught would be met by a working-class counter-attack, which would then relent (following calls for moderation from the reformist workers’ movement) as soon as reactionary pressure tapered off: the proletarians trusted the democrats to dismantle the armed bands. The fascist threat would pull back, regroup and go elsewhere, over time making itself credible to the same state from which the masses were expecting a solution. The proletarians were quicker to recognise the enemy in the black shirt of the street thug than in the “normal” uniform of a cop or soldier, draped in a legality sanctioned by habit, law and universal suffrage. The workers were militant, used guns, and turned many a Labour Exchange or *Casa di Popolo* into a fortress, but stayed nearly always on the defensive, waging a trench war against an ever mobile opponent.

At the beginning of July 1922, the CGL, by a two-thirds majority (against the communist minority’s one-third), declared its support for “any government guaranteeing the restoration of basic freedoms”. In the same month, the fascists seriously stepped up their attempts to penetrate the northern cities...

On August 1st, the Alliance of Labour, which included the railway workers' union, the CGL and the anarchist USI, called a general strike. Despite broad success, the Alliance officially called off the strike on the 3rd. In numerous cities, however, it continued in insurrectionary form, which was finally contained only by a combined effort of the police and the military, supported by naval cannon, and, of course, reinforced by the fascists.

Who defeated this proletarian energy? The general strike was broken by the state and the fasci, but it was also smothered by democracy, and its failure opened the way to a fascist solution to the crisis.

What followed was less a coup d'état than a transfer of power with the support of a whole array of forces. The "March on Rome" of the Duce (who actually took the train) was less a showdown than a bit of theatre: the fascists went through the motions of assaulting the state, the state went through the motions of defending itself, and Mussolini took power. His ultimatum of October 24 ("We Want To Become the State!") was not a threat of civil war, but a signal to the ruling class that the National Fascist Party represented the only force capable of restoring state authority, and of assuring the political unity of the country. The army could still have contained the fascist groups gathered in Rome, which were badly equipped and notoriously inferior on the military level, and the state could have withstood the seditious pressure. But the game was not being played on the military level. Under the influence of Badoglio in particular (the commander-in-chief in 1919-21) legitimate authority caved in. The king refused to proclaim a state of emergency, and on the 30th he asked the Duce to form a new government.

The liberals – the same people anti-fascism counts on to stop fascism – joined the government. With the exception of the socialists and the communists, all parties sought a rapprochement with the PNF and voted for Mussolini: the parliament, with only 35 fascist MPs, supported Mussolini's investiture 306-116. Giolitti himself, the great liberal icon of the time, an authoritarian reformer who had been head of state many times before the war, and then again in 1920-21, whom fashionable thought still fancies in retrospect as the sole politician capable of opposing Mussolini, supported him up to 1924. Democracy not only surrendered its powers to the dictator, but ratified them.

We might add that in the following months, several unions, including those of the railway workers and the sailors, declared themselves "national", patriotic, and therefore not hostile to the regime: repression did not spare them.

Turin: 1943

If Italian democracy yielded to fascism without a fight, the latter spawned democracy anew when it found itself no longer corresponding to the balance of social and political forces.

The central question after 1943, as in 1919, was how to control the working-class. In Italy more than in other countries, the end of World War II shows the class dimension of international conflict, which can never be explained by military logic alone. A general strike erupted at FIAT in October 1942. In March 1943, a strike wave rocked Turin and Milan, including attempts at forming workers' councils. In 1943-45, worker groups emerged, sometimes independent of the CP, sometimes calling themselves "Bordigists", often simultaneously antifascist, *rossi*, and armed. The regime could no longer maintain social equilibrium, just as the German alliance was becoming untenable against the rise of the Anglo-Americans, who were seen in every quarter as the future masters of Western Europe. Changing sides meant allying with the winners-to-be, but also meant rerouting worker revolts and partisan groups into a patriotic objective with a social content. On July 10, 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily. On the 24th, finding himself in a 19-17 minority on the Grand Fascist

Council, Mussolini resigned. Rarely has a dictator had to step aside for a majority vote.

Marshal Badoglio, who had been a dignitary of the regime ever since his support for the March on Rome, and who wanted to prevent, in his own words, “the collapse of the regime from swinging too far to the left”, formed a government which was still fascist but which no longer included the Duce, and turned to the democratic opposition. The democrats refused to participate, making the departure of the king a condition. After a second transitional government, Badoglio formed a third in April 1944, which included the leader of the CP, Togliatti. Under the pressure of the Allies and of the CP, the democrats agreed to accept the king (the Republic would be proclaimed by referendum in 1946). But Badoglio stirred up too many bad memories. In June, Bonomi, who 23 years earlier had ordered the officers to join the fasci, formed the first ministry to actually exclude the fascists. This is how Bonomi, ex-socialist, ex-warmonger, ex-minister, ex-“national bloc” (fascists included) MP, ex-government leader from July 1921 to February 1922, ex-everything, took office for six months as an anti-fascist. Later the situation was reoriented around the tripartite formula (Stalinists + Socialists + Christian Democrats) which would dominate both Italy and France in the first years after the war.

This game of musical chairs, often played by the self-same political class, was the theatre prop behind which democracy metamorphosed into dictatorship, and vice-versa. The phases of equilibrium and disequilibrium in class conflicts brought about a succession of political forms aimed at maintaining the same state, underwriting the same content. No one was more qualified to say it than the Spanish CP, when it declared, out of cynicism or naivety, during the transition from Francoism to democratic monarchy in the mid-70’s:

“Spanish society wants everything to be transformed so that the normal functioning of the state can be assured, without detours or social convulsions. The continuity of the state requires the non-continuity of the regime.”

Volksgemeinschaft Vs. Gemeinwesen

Counter-revolution inevitably triumphs on the terrain of revolution. Through its “people’s community” National Socialism would claim to have eliminated the parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy against which the proletariat revolted after 1917. But the conservative revolution also took over old anti-capitalist tendencies (the return to nature, the flight from cities...) that the workers’ parties, even the extremist ones, had misestimated by their refusal to integrate the a-classist and communitarian dimension of the proletariat, and their inability to think of the future as anything but an extension of heavy industry. In the first half of the 19th century, these themes were at the centre of the socialist movement’s preoccupations, before Marxism abandoned them in the name of progress and science, and they survived only in anarchism and in sects.

Volksgemeinschaft vs. *Gemeinwesen*, people’s community or the human community... 1933 was not the defeat, only the consummation of the defeat. Nazism arose and triumphed to defuse, resolve and to close a social crisis so deep that we still don’t appreciate its magnitude. Germany, cradle of the largest Social Democracy in the world, also gave rise to the strongest radical, anti-parliamentary, anti-union movement, one aspiring to a “workers’” world but also capable of attracting to itself many other anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist revolts. The presence of avant-garde artists in the ranks of the “German Left” is no accident. It was symptomatic of an attack on capital as “civilisation” in the way Fourier criticised it. The loss of community, individualism and gregariousness, sexual poverty, the family both undermined but affirmed as a refuge, the estrangement from nature, industrialised food, increasing artificiality, the prostheticisation of man, regimentation of time, social relations

increasingly mediated by money and technique: all these alienations passed through the fire of a diffuse and multi-formed critique. Only a superficial backward glance sees this ferment purely through the prism of its inevitable recuperation.

The counter-revolution triumphed in the 1920's only by laying the foundations, in Germany and in the US, of a consumer society and of Fordism, and by pulling millions of Germans, including workers, into industrial, commodified modernity. Ten years of fragile rule, as the mad hyperinflation of 1923 shows. This was followed in 1929 by an earthquake in which not the proletariat but capitalist practice itself repudiated the ideology of progress and an ever-increasing consumption of objects and signs.

Capitalist modernity was questioned twice in ten years, first by proletarians, then by capital. Nazi extremism and its violence were adequate to the depth of the revolutionary movement National-Socialism took over and negated. Like the radicals of 1919-21, Nazism proposed a community of wage-workers, but one which was authoritarian, closed, national, and racial, and for twelve years it succeeded in transforming proletarians into wage-workers and into soldiers.

Fascism grew out of capital, but out of a capital which destroyed old relationships without producing new stable ones brought about by consumerism. Commodities failed to give birth to modern capitalist community.

Berlin: 1919-33

Dictatorship always comes after the defeat of social movements, once they have been chloroformed and massacred by democracy, the leftist parties and the unions. In Italy, several months separated the final proletarian failures from the appointment of Mussolini as head of state. In Germany, a gap of a dozen years broke the continuity and made January 30, 1933 appear as an essentially political or ideological phenomenon, not as the effect of an earlier social earthquake. The popular basis of National Socialism and the murderous energy it unleashed remain mysteries if one ignores the question of the submission, revolt, and control of labour.

The German defeat of 1918 and the fall of the empire set in motion a proletarian assault strong enough to shake the foundations of society, but impotent when it came to revolutionising it, thus bringing Social Democracy and the unions to centre stage as the key to political equilibrium. Their leaders emerged as men of order, and had no scruples about calling in the *Freikorps*, fully fascist groupings with many future Nazis in their ranks, to repress a radical worker minority in the name of the interests of the reformist majority. First defeated by the rules of bourgeois democracy, the communists were also defeated by working-class democracy: the "works councils" placed their trust in the traditional organisations, not in the revolutionaries easily denounced as anti-democrats.

In this juncture, democracy and Social Democracy were indispensable to German capitalism for killing off the spirit of revolt in the polling booth, winning a series of reforms from the bosses, and dispersing the revolutionaries.

After 1929, on the other hand, capitalism needed to eliminate part of the middle classes, and to discipline the proletarians, and even the bourgeoisie. The workers' movement, defending as it did political pluralism and immediate worker interests, had become an obstacle. As mediators between capital and labour, working-class organisations derive their function from both, but also try to remain autonomous from both, and from the state. Social Democracy has meaning only as a force contending with the employers and the state, not as an organ absorbed by them. Its vocation is the management of an enormous political, municipal, social, mutualist and cultural network. The KPD, moreover, had quickly constituted its own empire, smaller but vast nonetheless. But as capital

becomes more and more organised, it tends to pull together all its different strands, bringing a statist element to the enterprise, a bourgeois element to the trade-union bureaucracy, and a social element to public administration. The weight of working-class reformism, which ultimately pervaded the state, and its existence as a “counter-society” made it a factor of social conservation which capital in crisis had to eliminate. By their defence of wage-labour as a component of capital, the SPD and the unions played an indispensable anti-communist part in 1918-21, but this same function later led them to put the interest of wage-labour ahead of everything else, to the detriment of the reorganisation of capital as a whole.

A stable bourgeois state would have tried to solve this problem by anti-union legislation, by recapturing the “worker fortress”, and by pitting the middle classes, in the name of modernity, against the archaism of the proles, as Thatcher’s England did much later. Such an offensive assumes that capital is relatively united under the control of a few dominant factions. But the German bourgeoisie of 1930 was profoundly divided, the middle classes had collapsed, and the nation-state was in shambles.

By negotiation or by force, modern democracy represents and reconciles antagonistic interests, to the extent that this is possible. Endless parliamentary crises and real or imagined plots (for which Germany was the stage after the fall of the last socialist chancellor in 1930) in a democracy are the invariable sign of long-term disarray in ruling circles. At the beginning of the 1930’s, the crisis whipsawed the bourgeoisie between irreconcilable social and geopolitical strategies: either the increased integration or the elimination of the workers’ movement; international trade and pacifism, or autarchy laying the foundations of a military expansion. The solution did not necessarily imply a Hitler, but it did presuppose a concentration of force and violence in the hands of central government. Once the centrist-reformist compromise had exhausted itself, the only option left was statist, protectionist and repressive.

A programme of this kind required the violent dismantling of Social Democracy, which in its domestication of the workers had come to exercise excessive influence, while still being incapable of unifying all of Germany behind it. This unification was the task of Nazism, which was able to appeal to all classes, from the unemployed to the industrial tycoons, with a demagogy that even surpassed that of the bourgeois politicians, and an anti-semitism intended to build cohesion through exclusion.

How could the working-class parties have made themselves into an obstacle to such xenophobic and racist madness, after having so often been the fellow travellers of nationalism? For the SPD, this had been clear since the turn of the century, obvious in 1914, and signed in blood in the 1919 pact with the *Freikorps*, who were cast very much in the same warrior mould as their contemporaries, the *fasci*.

Besides, socialists had not been immune to anti-semitism. Abraham Berlau’s *The German Social-Democratic Party 1914-1921* (Columbia 1949) describes how many SPD or union leaders, and even the prestigious *Neue Zeit*, openly raved against “foreign” (i.e. Polish and Russian) Jews. In March 1920 the Berlin police (under socialist supervision) raided the Jewish district and sent about 1000 people to a concentration camp. All were freed later, but the labour movement did contribute to the spread of anti-semitism.

The KPD, for its part, had not hesitated to ally with the nationalists against the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. No Comintern theoretician opposed Radek when he stated that “only the working-class can save the nation”. The KPD leader Thalheimer made it clear that the party should fight alongside the German bourgeoisie, which played “an objectively revolutionary role through its foreign policy”. Later, around 1930, the KPD demanded a “national and social liberation” and

denounced fascism as a “traitor to the nation”. Talk of “national revolution” was so common among German Stalinists that it inspired Trotsky’s 1931 pamphlet *Against National-Communism*.

In January 1933, the die was cast. No one can deny that the Weimar Republic willingly gave itself to Hitler. Both the right and the centre had come round to seeing him as a viable solution to get the country out of its impasse, or as a temporary lesser evil. “Big capital”, reticent about any uncontrollable upheaval, had not, up to that time, been any more generous with the NSDAP than with the other nationalist and right-wing formations. Only in November 1932 did Schacht, an intimate adviser of the bourgeoisie, convince business circles to support Hitler (who had, moreover, just seen his electoral support slightly decline) because he saw in Hitler a force capable of unifying the state and society. The fact that industrial magnates did not foresee what then ensued, leading to war and defeat, is another question, and in any event they were not notable by their presence in the clandestine resistance to the regime.

On January 30, 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor in complete legality by Hindenburg, who himself had been constitutionally elected president a year earlier with the support of the socialists, who saw in him a rampart against... Hitler. The Nazis were a minority in the first government formed by the leader of the NSDAP.

In the following weeks, the masks were taken off: working-class militants were hunted down, their offices were sacked, and a reign of terror was launched. In the elections of March 1933, held against the backdrop of violence by both the storm-troopers and the police, 288 NSDAP MPs were sent to the Reichstag (while the KPD still retained 80 and the SPD 120).

Naive people might express surprise at the docility with which the repressive apparatus goes over to dictators, but the state machine obeys the authority commanding it. Did the new leaders not enjoy full legitimacy? Did eminent jurists not write their decrees in conformity with the higher laws of the land? In the democratic state – and Weimar was one – if there is conflict between the two components of the binomial, it is not democracy which will win out. In a “state founded on law” – and Weimar was also one – if there is a contradiction, it is law which must bend to serve the state, and never the opposite.

During these few months, what did the democrats do? Those on the right accepted the new dispensation. The Zentrum, the Catholic party of the centre, which had even seen its support increase in the March 1933 elections, voted to give four years of full emergency powers to Hitler, powers which became the legal basis of Nazi dictatorship.

The socialists, for their part, attempted to avoid the fate of the KPD, which had been outlawed on February 28 in the wake of the Reichstag fire. On March 30, 1933, they left the Second International to prove their national German character. On May 17 their parliamentary group voted in support of Hitler’s foreign policy.

On June 22, the SPD was dissolved as “an enemy of the people and the state”. A few weeks later, the Zentrum was forced to dissolve itself.

The unions followed in the footsteps of the Italian CGL, and hoped to salvage what they could by insisting that they were a-political. In 1932, the union leaders had proclaimed their independence from all parties and their indifference to the form of the state. This did not stop them from seeking an accord with Schleicher, who was chancellor from November 1932 to January 1933, and who was looking for a base and some credible pro-worker demagogy. Once the Nazis had formed a government, the union leaders convinced themselves that if they recognised National Socialism, the regime would leave them some small space. This strategy culminated in the farce of union members marching under the swastika on May Day 1933, which had been renamed “Festival of German Labour”. It was wasted effort. In the following days, the Nazis liquidated the unions and arrested

the militants.

Having been schooled to contain the masses and to negotiate in their name or, that failing, to repress them, the working-class bureaucracy was still fighting the previous war. The labour bureaucrats were not being attacked for their lack of patriotism. What bothered the bourgeoisie was not the bureaucrats' lingering lip service to the old pre-1914 internationalism, but rather the existence of trade-unions, however servile, retaining a certain independence in an era in which even an institution of class collaboration became superfluous if the state did not completely control it.

Week 10

Stalinism

Perched at the top of the Soviet state after World War II, Joseph Stalin could claim awesome accomplishments of his rule. His “socialism in one state” country had industrialized at a breakneck scale, utilizing Five Year Plans; survived three foreign invasions since the Revolution (WWI, Russian Civil War, WWII); and provided the main force behind the defeat of fascism – USSR casualties in WWII exceeded 20 million, including those from the apocalyptic Siege of Leningrad and Battle of Stalingrad. As the Cold War between Russia and the United States dawned, Stalin could also boast of being one of the first two countries to possess nuclear weapons.

However, Stalin’s name today is more often associated with totalitarianism than success. Censorship; the rewriting of history; the assassination of rivals (including Trotsky in 1940); mass political purges; the Gulag; show trials; the secret police; a cult of personality; a climate of paranoia and terror; pervasive propaganda; forced agricultural collectivization; famine; executions and deportations – only after his death in 1953 would the Communist Party and its sympathizers begin to come to grips with Stalin’s legacy.

Trotsky’s view of how Stalin corrupted the Russian Revolution, *The Revolution Betrayed* is this week’s first reading. Subsequent readings give different perspectives on this dynamic: C.L.R. James’ *Russia – A Fascist State*, H.H. Ticktin’s *Towards a Political Economy of the USSR* and Christopher Arthur’s *Epitaph for the USSR: A Clock Without a Spring*.

The Eley chapter for this week is 19.

10.1 Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936)

Chapter 1: What Has Been Achieved

1. The Principal Indices of Industrial Growth

Owing to the insignificance of the Russian bourgeoisie, the democratic tasks of backward Russia – such as liquidation of the monarchy and the semi-feudal slavery of the peasants – could be achieved only through a dictatorship of the proletariat. The proletariat, however, having seized the power at the head of the peasant masses, could not stop at the achievement of these democratic tasks. The bourgeois revolution was directly bound up with the first stages of a socialist revolution. That fact was not accidental. The history of recent decades very clearly shows that, in the conditions of capitalist decline, backward countries are unable to attain that level which the old centers of

capitalism have attained. Having themselves arrived in a blind alley, the highly civilized nations block the road of proletarian revolution, not because her economy was the first to become ripe for a socialist change, but because she could not develop further on a capitalist basis. Socialization of the means of production had become a necessary condition for bringing the country out of barbarism. That is the *law of combined development* for backward countries. Entering upon the socialist revolution as “the weakest link in the capitalist chain” (Lenin), the former empire of the tzars is even now, in the 19th year after the revolution, still confronted with the task of “catching up with and outstripping” – consequently in the first place catching up with – Europe and America. She has, that is, to solve those problems of technique and productivity which were long ago solved by capitalism in the advanced countries.

Could it indeed be otherwise? The overthrow of the old ruling classes did not achieve, but only completely revealed, the task: to rise from barbarism to culture. At the same time, by concentrating the means of production in the hands of the state, the revolution made it possible to apply new and incomparably more effective industrial methods. Only thanks to a planned directive was it possible in so brief a span to restore what had been destroyed by the imperialist and civil wars, to create gigantic new enterprises, to introduce new kinds of production and establish new branches of industry.

The extraordinary tardiness in the development of the international revolution, upon whose prompt aid the leaders of the Bolshevik party had counted, created immense difficulties for the Soviet Union, but also revealed its inner powers and resources. However, a correct appraisal of the results achieved – their grandeur as well as their inadequacy – is possible only with the help of an international scale of measurement. This book will be a historic and sociological interpretation of the process, not a piling up of statistical illustrations. Nevertheless, in the interests of the further discussion, it is necessary to take as a point of departure certain important mathematical data.

The vast scope of industrialization in the Soviet Union, as against a background of stagnation and decline in almost the whole capitalist world, appears unanswerably in the following gross indices. Industrial production in Germany, thanks solely to feverish war preparations, is now returning to the level of 1929. Production in Great Britain, holding to the apron strings of protectionism, has raised itself 3 or 4 per cent during these six years. Industrial production in the United States has declined approximately 25 per cent; in France, more than 30 per cent. First place among capitalist countries is occupied by Japan, who is furiously arming herself and robbing her neighbors. Her production has risen almost 40 per cent! But even this exceptional index fades before the dynamic of development in the Soviet Union. Her industrial production has increased during this same period approximately 3.5 times, or 250 per cent. The heavy industries have increased their production during the last decade (1925 to 1935) more than 10 times. In the first year of the five-year plan (1928 to 1929), capital investments amounted to 5.4 billion rubles; for 1936, 32 billion are indicated.

If in view of the instability of the ruble as a unit of measurement, we lay aside money estimates, we arrive at another unit which is absolutely unquestionable. In December 1913, the Don basin produced 2,275,000 tons of coal; in December 1935, 7,125,000 tons. During the last three years the production of iron has doubled. The production of steel and of the rolling mills has increased almost 2.5 times. The output of oil, coal and iron has increased from 3 to 3.5 times the pre-war figure. In 1920, when the first plan of electrification was drawn up, there were 10 district power stations in the country with a total power production of 253,000 kilowatts. In 1935, there were already 95 of these stations with a total power of 4,345,000 kilowatts. In 1925, the Soviet Union stood 11th in the production of electro-energy; in 1935, it was second only to Germany and the United States. In the production of coal, the Soviet Union has moved forward from 10th to 4th place. In steel, from

6th to 3rd place. In the production of tractors, to the 1st place in the world. This also is true of the production of sugar.

Gigantic achievement in industry, enormously promising beginnings in agriculture, an extraordinary growth of the old industrial cities and a building of new ones, a rapid increase of the numbers of workers, a rise in cultural level and cultural demands – such are the indubitable results of the October revolution, in which the prophets of the old world tried to see the grave of human civilization. With the bourgeois economists we have no longer anything to quarrel over. Socialism has demonstrated its right to victory, not on the pages of *Das Kapital*, but in an industrial arena comprising a sixth part of the earth's surface – not in the language of dialectics, but in the language of steel, cement and electricity. Even if the Soviet Union, as a result of internal difficulties, external blows and the mistakes of leadership, were to collapse – which we firmly hope will not happen – there would remain an earnest of the future this indestructible fact, that thanks solely to a proletarian revolution a backward country has achieved in less than 10 years successes unexampled in history.

This also ends the quarrel with the reformists in the workers movement. Can we compare for one moment their mouselike fussing with the titanic work accomplished by this people aroused to a new life by revolution? If in 1918 the Social-Democrats of Germany had employed the power imposed upon them by the workers for a socialist revolution, and not for the rescue of capitalism, it is easy to see on the basis of the Russian experience what unconquerable economic power would be possessed today by a socialist bloc of Central and Eastern Europe and a considerable part of Asia. The peoples of the world will pay for the historic crime of reformism with new wars and revolutions.

Chapter 3: Socialism and the State

1. The Transitional Regime

Is it true, as the official authorities assert, that socialism is already realized in the Soviet Union? And if not, have the achieved successes at least made sure of its realization within the national boundaries, regardless of the course of events in the rest of the world? The preceding critical appraisal of the chief indices of the Soviet economy ought to give us the point of departure for a correct answer to this question, but we shall require also certain preliminary theoretical points of reference.

Marxism sets out from the development of technique as the fundamental spring of progress, and constructs the communist program upon the dynamic of the productive forces. If you conceive that some cosmic catastrophe is going to destroy our planet in the fairly near future, then you must, of course, reject the communist perspective along with much else. Except for this as yet problematic danger, however, there is not the slightest scientific ground for setting any limit in advance to our technical productive and cultural possibilities. Marxism is saturated with the optimism of progress, and that alone, by the way, makes it irreconcilably opposed to religion.

The material premise of communism should be so high a development of the economic powers of man that productive labor, having ceased to be a burden, will not require any goad, and the distribution of life's goods, existing in continual abundance, will not demand – as it does not now in any well-off family or “decent” boarding-house – any control except that of education, habit and social opinion. Speaking frankly, I think it would be pretty dull-witted to consider such a really modest perspective “utopian.”

Capitalism prepared the conditions and forces for a social revolution: technique, science and the proletariat. The communist structure cannot, however, immediately replace the bourgeois society. The material and cultural inheritance from the past is wholly inadequate for that. In its first steps

the workers' state cannot yet permit everyone to work "according to his abilities" – that is, as much as he can and wishes to – nor can it reward everyone "according to his needs", regardless of the work he does. In order to increase the productive forces, it is necessary to resort to the customary norms of wage payment – that is, to the distribution of life's goods in proportion to the quantity and quality of individual labor.

Marx named this first stage of the new society "the lowest stage of communism", in distinction from the highest, where together with the last phantoms of want material inequality will disappear. In this sense socialism and communism are frequently contrasted as the lower and higher stages of the new society. "We have not yet, of course, *complete* communism," reads the present official Soviet doctrine, "but we have already achieved socialism – that is, the *lowest* stage of communism." In proof of this, they adduce the dominance of the state trusts in industry, the collective farms in agriculture, the state and co-operative enterprises in commerce. At first glance this gives a complete correspondence with the *a priori* – and therefore hypothetical – scheme of Marx. But it is exactly for the Marxist that this question is not exhausted by a consideration of forms of property regardless of the achieved productivity of labor. By the lowest stage of communism Marx meant, at any rate, a society which from the very beginning stands higher in its economic development than the most advanced capitalism. Theoretically such a conception is flawless, for taken on a world scale communism, even in its first incipient stage, means a higher level of development than that of bourgeois society. Moreover, Marx expected that the Frenchman would begin the social revolution, the German continue it, the Englishman finish it; and as to the Russian, Marx left him far in the rear. But this conceptual order was upset by the facts. Whoever tries now mechanically to apply the universal historic conception of Marx to the particular case of the Soviet Union at the given stage of its development, will be entangled at once in hopeless contradictions.

Russia was not the strongest, but the weakest link in the chain of capitalism. The present Soviet Union does not stand above the world level of economy, but is only trying to catch up to the capitalist countries. If Marx called that society which was to be formed upon the basis of a socialization of the productive forces of the most advanced capitalism of its epoch, the lowest stage of communism, then this designation obviously does not apply to the Soviet Union, which is still today considerably poorer in technique, culture and the good things of life than the capitalist countries. It would be truer, therefore, to name the present Soviet regime in all its contradictoriness, not a socialist regime, but a preparatory regime transitional from capitalism to socialism.

There is not an ounce of pedantry in this concern for terminological accuracy. The strength and stability of regimes are determined in the long run by the relative productivity of their labor. A socialist economy possessing a technique superior to that of capitalism would really be guaranteed in its socialist development for sure – so to speak, automatically – a thing which unfortunately it is still quite impossible to say about the Soviet economy.

... It is exactly because the Soviet Union is as yet far from having attained the first stage of socialism, as a balanced system of production and distribution, that its development does not proceed harmoniously, but in contradictions. Economic contradictions produce social antagonisms, which in turn develop their own logic, not awaiting the further growth of the productive forces. We have just seen how true this was in the case of the *kulak* who did not wish to "grow" evolutionarily into socialism, and who, to the surprise of the bureaucracy and its ideologues, demanded a new and supplementary revolution. Will the bureaucracy itself, in whose hands the power and wealth are concentrated, wish to grow more peacefully into socialism? As to this, doubts are certainly permissible. In any case, it would be imprudent to take the word of the bureaucracy for it. It is impossible at present to answer finally and irrevocably the question in what direction the economic

contradictions and social antagonisms of Soviet society will develop in the course of the next three, five or 10 years. The outcome depends upon a struggle of living social forces – not on a national scale, either, but on an international scale. At every new stage, therefore, a concrete analysis is necessary of actual relations and tendencies in their connection and continual interaction. We shall now see the importance of such an analysis in the case of the state.

2. Program and Reality

Lenin, following Marx and Engels, saw the first distinguishing features of the proletarian revolution in the fact that, having expropriated the exploiters, it would abolish the necessity of a bureaucratic apparatus raised above society – and above all, a police and standing army.

“The proletariat needs a state – this all the opportunists can tell you,” wrote Lenin in 1917, two months before the seizure of power, “but they, the opportunists, forget to add that the proletariat needs only a dying state – that is, a state constructed in such a way that it immediately begins to die away and cannot help dying away.” (*State and Revolution*)

This criticism was directed at the time against reformist socialists of the type of the Russian Mensheviks, British Fabians, etc. It now attacks with redoubled force the Soviet idolators with their cult of a bureaucratic state which has not the slightest intention of “dying away.”

The social demand for a bureaucracy arise in all those situations where sharp antagonisms need to be “softened”, “adjusted”, “regulated” (always in the interests of the privileged, the possessors, and always to the advantage of the bureaucracy itself). Throughout all bourgeois revolutions, therefore, no matter how democratic, there has occurred a reinforcement and perfecting of the bureaucratic apparatus.

“Officialdom and the standing army,” writes Lenin, “that is a ‘parasite’ on the body of bourgeois society, a parasite created by the inner contradictions which tear this society, yet nothing but a parasite stopping up the living pores.”

Beginning with 1917 – that is, from the moment when the conquest of power confronted the party as a practical problem – Lenin was continually occupied with the thought of liquidating this “parasite.” After the overthrow of the exploiting classes – he repeats and explains in every chapter of *State and Revolution* – the proletariat will shatter the old bureaucratic machine and create its own apparatus out of employees and workers. ...

The regime of proletarian dictatorship from its very beginning thus ceases to be a “state” in the old sense of the word – a special apparatus, that is, for holding in subjection the majority of the people. The material power, together with the weapons, goes over directly and immediately into the hands of the workers’ organizations such as the soviets. The state as a bureaucratic apparatus begins to die away the first day of the proletarian dictatorship. Such is the voice of the party program – not voided to this day. Strange: it sounds like a spectral voice from the mausoleum.

However you may interpret the nature of the present Soviet state, on thing is indubitable: at the end of its second decade of existence, it has not only not died away, but not begun to “die away.” Worse than that, it has grown into a hitherto unheard of apparatus of compulsion. The bureaucracy not only has not disappeared, yielding its place to the masses, but has turned into an uncontrolled force dominating the masses. The army not only has not been replaced by an armed people, but

has given birth to a privileged officers' caste, crowned with marshals, while the people, "the armed bearers of the dictatorship", are now forbidden in the Soviet Union to carry even nonexplosive weapons. With the utmost stretch of fancy it would be difficult to imagine a contrast more striking than that which exists between the scheme of the workers' state according to Marx, Engels and Lenin, and the actual state now headed by Stalin. While continuing to publish the works of Lenin (to be sure, with excerpts and distortions by the censor), the present leaders of the Soviet Union and their ideological representatives do not even raise the question of the causes of such a crying divergence between program and reality. We will try to do this for them.

3. The Dual Character of the Workers' State

The proletarian dictatorship is just a bridge between the bourgeois and the socialist society. In its very essence, therefore, it bears a temporary character. An incidental but very essential task of the state which realizes the dictatorship consists in preparing for its own dissolution. The degree of the realization of this "incidental" task is, to some extent, a measure of its success in the fulfillment of its fundamental mission: the construction of a society without classes and without material contradictions. Bureaucracy and social harmony are inversely proportional to each other.

In his famous polemic against Dühring, Engels wrote:

"When, together with class domination and the struggle for individual existence created by the present anarchy in production, those conflicts and excesses which result from this struggle disappear, from that time on there will be nothing to suppress, and there will be no need for a special instrument of suppression, the state."

The philistine considers the gendarme an eternal institution. In reality, the gendarme will bridle mankind only until man shall thoroughly bridle nature. In order that the state shall disappear, "class domination and the struggle for individual existence" must disappear. Engels joins these two conditions together, for in the perspective of changing social regimes a few decades amount to nothing. But the thing looks different to those generations who bear the weight of a revolution. It is true that capitalist anarchy creates the struggle of each against all, but the trouble is that a socialization of the means of production does not yet automatically remove the "struggle for individual existence." That is the nub of the question!

A socialist state even in America, on the basis of the most advanced capitalism, could not immediately provide everyone with as much as he needs, and would therefore be compelled to spur everyone to produce as much as possible. The duty of the stimulator in these circumstances naturally falls to the state, which in its turn cannot but resort, with various changes and mitigations, to the method of labor payment worked out by capitalism. It was in this sense that Marx wrote in 1875:

"Bourgeois law ... is inevitable in the first phase of the communist society, in that form in which it issues after long labor pains from capitalist society. Law can never be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by that structure."

In explaining these remarkable lines, Lenin adds:

"Bourgeois law in relation to the distribution of the objects of consumption assumes, of course, inevitably a bourgeois state, for law is nothing without an apparatus capable of compelling observance of its norms. It follows (we are still quoting Lenin) that under

Communism not only will bourgeois law survive for a certain time, but also even a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie!”

This highly significant conclusion, completely ignored by the present official theoreticians, has a decisive significance for the understanding of the nature of the Soviet state – or more accurately, for a first approach to such understanding. Insofar as the state which assumes the task of socialist transformation is compelled to defend inequality – that is, the material privileges of a minority – by methods of compulsion, insofar does it also remain a “bourgeois” state, even though without a bourgeoisie. These words contain neither praise nor blame; they name things with their real name.

The bourgeois norms of distribution, by hastening the growth of material power, ought to serve socialist aims – but only in the last analysis. The state assumes directly and from the very beginning a dual character: socialistic, insofar as it defends social property in the means of production; bourgeois, insofar as the distribution of life’s goods is carried out with a capitalistic measure of value and all the consequences ensuing therefrom. Such a contradictory characterization may horrify the dogmatists and scholastics; we can only offer them our condolences.

...

Chapter 9: Social Relations in the Soviet Union

1. State Capitalism

We often seek salvation from unfamiliar phenomena in familiar terms. An attempt has been made to conceal the enigma of the Soviet regime by calling it “state capitalism.” This term has the advantage that nobody knows exactly what it means. The term “state capitalism” originally arose to designate all the phenomena which arise when a bourgeois state takes direct charge of the means of transport or of industrial enterprises. The very necessity of such measures is one of the signs that the productive forces have outgrown capitalism and are bringing it to a partial self-negation in practice. But the outworn system, along with its elements of self-negation, continues to exist as a capitalist system.

Theoretically, to be sure, it is possible to conceive a situation in which the bourgeoisie as a whole constitutes itself a stock company which, by means of its state, administers the whole national economy. The economic laws of such a regime would present no mysteries. A single capitalist, as is well known, receives in the form of profit, not that part of the surplus value which is directly created by the workers of his own enterprise, but a share of the combined surplus value created throughout the country proportionate to the amount of his own capital. Under an integral “state capitalism”, this law of the equal rate of profit would be realized, not by devious routes – that is, competition among different capitals – but immediately and directly through state bookkeeping. Such a regime never existed, however, and, because of profound contradictions among the proprietors themselves, never will exist – the more so since, in its quality of universal repository of capitalist property, the state would be too tempting an object for social revolution.

During the war, and especially during the experiments in fascist economy, the term “state capitalism” has oftenest been understood to mean a system of state interference and regulation. The French employ a much more suitable term for this *etatism*. There are undoubtedly points of contact between state capitalism and “state-ism”, but taken as systems they are opposite rather than identical. State capitalism means the substitution of state property for private property, and for that very reason remains partial in character. State-ism, no matter where in Italy, Mussolini, in Germany, Hitler, in America, Roosevelt, or in France, Leon Blum – means state intervention

on the basis of private property, and with the goal of preserving it. Whatever be the programs of the government, stateism inevitably leads to a transfer of the damages of the decaying system from strong shoulders to weak. It “rescues” the small proprietor from complete ruin only to the extent that his existence is necessary for the preservation of big property. The planned measures of stateism are dictated not by the demands of a development of the productive forces, but by a concern for the preservation of private property at the expense of the productive forces, which are in revolt against it. ...

...

The first concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state to occur in history was achieved by the proletariat with the method of social revolution, and not by capitalists with the method of state trustification. Our brief analysis is sufficient to show how absurd are the attempts to identify capitalist state-ism with the Soviet system. The former is reactionary, the latter progressive.

2. Is the Bureaucracy a Ruling Class?

Classes are characterized by their position in the social system of economy, and primarily by their relation to the means of production. In civilized societies, property relations are validated by laws. The nationalization of the land, the means of industrial production, transport and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade, constitute the basis of the Soviet social structure. Through these relations, established by the proletarian revolution, the nature of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state is for us basically defined.

In its intermediary and regulating function, its concern to maintain social ranks, and its exploitation of the state apparatus for personal goals, the Soviet bureaucracy is similar to every other bureaucracy, especially the fascist. But it is also in a vast way different. In no other regime has a bureaucracy ever achieved such a degree of independence from the dominating class. In bourgeois society, the bureaucracy represents the interests of a possessing and educated class, which has at its disposal innumerable means of everyday control over its administration of affairs. The Soviet bureaucracy has risen above a class which is hardly emerging from destitution and darkness, and has no tradition of dominion or command. Whereas the fascists, when they find themselves in power, are united with the big bourgeoisie by bonds of common interest, friendship, marriage, etc., the Soviet bureaucracy takes on bourgeois customs without having beside it a national bourgeoisie. In this sense we cannot deny that it is something more than a bureaucracy. It is in the full sense of the word the sole privileged and commanding stratum in the Soviet society.

Another difference is no less important. The Soviet bureaucracy has expropriated the proletariat politically in order by methods of its own to defend the social conquests. But the very fact of its appropriation of political power in a country where the principal means of production are in the hands of the state, creates a new and hitherto unknown relation between the bureaucracy and the riches of the nation. The means of production belong to the state. But the state, so to speak, “belongs” to the bureaucracy. If these as yet wholly new relations should solidify, become the norm and be legalized, whether with or without resistance from the workers, they would, in the long run, lead to a complete liquidation of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution. But to speak of that now is at least premature. The proletariat has not yet said its last word. The bureaucracy has not yet created social supports for its dominion in the form of special types of property. It is compelled to defend state property as the source of its power and its income. In this aspect of its activity it still remains a weapon of proletarian dictatorship.

The attempt to represent the Soviet bureaucracy as a class of “state capitalists” will obviously

not withstand criticism. The bureaucracy has neither stocks nor bonds. It is recruited, supplemented and renewed in the manner of an administrative hierarchy, independently of any special property relations of its own. The individual bureaucrat cannot transmit to his heirs his rights in the exploitation of the state apparatus. The bureaucracy enjoys its privileges under the form of an abuse of power. It conceals its income; it pretends that as a special social group it does not even exist. Its appropriation of a vast share of the national income has the character of social parasitism. All this makes the position of the commanding Soviet stratum in the highest degree contradictory, equivocal and undignified, notwithstanding the completeness of its power and the smoke screen of flattery that conceals it.

Bourgeois society has in the course of its history displaced many political regimes and bureaucratic castes, without changing its social foundations. It has preserved itself against the restoration of feudal and guild relations by the superiority of its productive methods. The state power has been able either to co-operate with capitalist development, or put brakes on it. But in general the productive forces, upon a basis of private property and competition, have been working out their own destiny. In contrast to this, the property relations which issued from the socialist revolution are indivisibly bound up with the new state as their repository. The predominance of socialist over petty bourgeois tendencies is guaranteed, not by the automatism of the economy – we are still far from that – but by political measures taken by the dictatorship. The character of the economy as a whole thus depends upon the character of the state power.

A collapse of the Soviet regime would lead inevitably to the collapse of the planned economy, and thus to the abolition of state property. The bond of compulsion between the trusts and the factories within them would fall away. The more successful enterprises would succeed in coming out on the road of independence. They might convert or they might find some themselves into stock companies, other transitional form of property – one, for example, in which the workers should participate in the profits. The collective farms would disintegrate at the same time, and far more easily. The fall of the present bureaucratic dictatorship, if it were not replaced by a new socialist power, would thus mean a return to capitalist relations with a catastrophic decline of industry and culture.

But if a socialist government is still absolutely necessary for the preservation and development of the planned economy, the question is all the more important, upon whom the present Soviet government relies, and in what measure the socialist character of its policy is guaranteed. At the 11th Party Congress in March 1922, Lenin, in practically bidding farewell to the party, addressed these words to the commanding group: “History knows transformations of all sorts. To rely upon conviction, devotion and other excellent spiritual qualities – that is not to be taken seriously in politics.” Being determines consciousness. During the last fifteen years, the government has changed its social composition even more deeply than its ideas. Since of all the strata of Soviet society the bureaucracy has best solved its own social problem, and is fully content with the existing situation, it has ceased to offer any subjective guarantee whatever of the socialist direction of its policy. It continues to preserve state property only to the extent that it fears the proletariat. This saving fear is nourished and supported by the illegal party of Bolshevik-Leninists, which is the most conscious expression of the socialist tendencies opposing that bourgeois reaction with which the Thermidorian bureaucracy is completely saturated. As a conscious political force the bureaucracy has betrayed the revolution. But a victorious revolution is fortunately not only a program and a banner, not only political institutions, but also a system of social relations. To betray it is not enough. You have to overthrow it. The October revolution has been betrayed by the ruling stratum, but not yet overthrown. It has a great power of resistance, coinciding with the established property relations,

with the living force of the proletariat, the consciousness of its best elements, the impasse of world capitalism, and the inevitability of world revolution.

10.2 C.L.R. James, Russia – A Fascist State (1941)

Many comrades accept “in the main” Trotsky’s method of analyzing the U.S.S.R. but wish to change his conclusions. They are pursuing a false path. Trotsky’s basis was the state property form. If he was wrong, it is there, at the start. ...

... With irrevocable emphasis he declared that his basis was the property form. His initial and overwhelming mistake was to identify state property indivisibly with the proletariat as ruling class. As late as October 1933 he declared that a “real civil war” between the proletariat and the bureaucracy was impossible. The history of his theory is the record of his retreat step by step from his initial position until in the *U.S.S.R. in War* he abandoned it.

Thus Trotsky and we who followed him failed to distinguish between first, means of production in the hands of the state where the state is merely an economic form like a trust, a bank, or a cartel; second, state ownership as a purely juridical relation, which tells us no more than that it is the duty of the state to organize production and distribute the product; and third, a workers’ state, *i.e.*, a state transitional to socialism; this last is not a juridical question at all but a question of the economic conditions and social relations of production, which can be summed up in one phrase: is the working class master or not? The third category includes the other two. But neither singly nor together do the first two necessarily include the third. We have made a colossal error here in the past. We must recognize it frankly, abandon the method decisively, trace its historical and theoretical roots and consequences, and start afresh. Lucky for us that we have not to do it in the heat of action as the Bolsheviks in 1917.

Within the state property form the working class can be master as in 1921 or enslaved as in 1941. Two such antithetical social relationships alter the entire character and movement of production, that is to say, the very type of economy.

Capital Is Conditioned on Wage-Labor

We must begin with productive relations, and not in Russia, but with the productive relations of the capitalist epoch as analyzed by Marx. Implicit with many is the idea that Marx did not “foresee” fascism or Stalinist Russia. Certainly Marx did not “foresee” anything. He was an economist, not a rabbi. (How these primitive habits of thought persist!) But he certainly thought he had discovered the essential characteristics of all modern society. Let us see what he meant.

For Marx, means of production and laborers are the basis of all societies, and the special way these are united distinguish the various economic epochs from each other. In earlier epochs, means of production were united with the slave or the serf. Though owned, they were not capital. Wage-labor is the specific condition of the means of production assuming the form of capital. And this one historical condition, says Marx, comprises a world’s history. The wage-laborer sells his labor-power for a fixed time. The wage-laborer is entirely divorced from the means of production. *In these respects capitalist society is unique.* Neither the communal laborer, the ancient slave, nor the serf were divorced from the means of production. All produced mainly their own subsistence and the subsistence of their masters. *They did not predominantly produce commodities for exchange. Hence the stagnant character of their production.* Marx saw that society, after four hundred years of capitalist development and the creation of the world market, could never again go back to

subsistence production. Therefore the future in its broad outline was plain. The mass of humanity would increasingly be wage-laborers and for this reason the means of production would continue to be monopolized by a few. The result of this would be increasing misery and degradation of the wage-laborers. To prevent themselves from perishing the laborers would be compelled to seize the means of production and thereby abolish wage-labor and the capital relationship. Otherwise, barbarism.

That is all he said and it is plenty. In that sense there is no possible economic structure of society, *i.e.*, combination of means of production and laborers, which Marx's analysis did not embrace. A fascist "class" may arise, in the narrow sense that Bukharin speaks of rentiers in the *Economic Theory of the Leisure Class*. The fascists may even supersede the bourgeoisie entirely (though I see no sign of it). How would that affect the economic structure of society? They would produce for all, (as they said they would)? But this could be done only by abolition of the system of wage-labor and monopoly of the means of production. To a Marxist the idea that a minority ruling class would continue to monopolize the means of production but distribute the product equally, is an intolerable stupidity. Or the fascists would bluff, mediate and maneuver, Bonapartist fashion, leaving the mass of producers as wage-laborers (which is what they have actually done). State ownership, private property, bureaucratic collectivism, managerial society, all these have to be seen within the frame work of the fundamental relationship of capital and wage-labor and the inevitable consequences. That knowledge is the greatest strength of our movement. With it we have a basis for all our analysis, whatever problems we face. Without it? Look at the mass of confusion and groping, patch-work and adventurism now proliferating in the movement. If we want to break with Marx's foundation we must do so consciously and deliberately.

The belief that Marx did not "analyze" Stalinist Russia springs from a complete imperviousness to Marx's finest work – his abstract definitions. Let me give one example. Surplus value, we know, is generated not by the constant capital, the capital invested in means of production, but by the variable capital, the capital invested in wages. Now observe the elasticity of Marx's method: "It does not alter this essential fact that the capitalist may pay the laborer either in money or in means of subsistence. This alters merely the mode of existence of the value advanced by the capitalist, seeing that in one case it has the form of money for which the laborer himself buys his means of subsistence on the market, in the other case that of means of subsistence which he consumes directly." Marx is now trimming his definition to the bone. "A developed capitalist production rests indeed on the assumption that the laborer is paid in money and more generally on the assumption that the process of production is promoted by the process of circulation, in other words, by the monetary system." The monetary system promotes but it is not absolutely necessary, so Marx throws it out. "But the production of surplus value – and consequently the capitalization of the advanced sum of values – has its source neither in the money form, nor in the natural form of wages, or of the capital invested in the purchase of labor power. It arises out of the exchange of value for a power treating value, the conversion of a constant into a variable magnitude." Yet you can quote Marx on money interminably and drug yourself into the belief that a society which does not use money in the process of production is not capitalist. But it is precisely in the superb simplicity of these definitions, that we can grasp the insight which led him to say: "I have discovered the economic law of motion of modern society." Trotsky on the other hand says that the bureaucracy is not a capitalist class because it has neither stocks nor bonds! The far-reaching character of this error shows how deeply Trotsky was entangled in the most superficial aspects of property relations. Marx almost always makes jokes at stocks and bonds. They are merely titles to surplus-value. They do not determine capitalist production. *We shall soon see this misconception coming up again.* If Hitler

wiped away stocks and bonds tomorrow, and paid wages in subsistence, how the typewriters would tick with new societies.

Wage-Labor in Russia

In Russia the proletariat is a class of wage-laborers. The peasantry, despite all the fictions of the property forms, are wage-laborers, some of them receiving part of their wages in subsistence and all receiving a strictly controlled bonus on the year's work. This predominance of wage-labor makes the means of production capital. *The means of production, monopolized by a section of society, in their role of capital, have an independent life and movement of their own.* The bureaucracy then becomes what Marx always insisted the capitalist class is, merely the representative, the agent, the personification, the incarnation of capital. The agents or representatives of the means of production as capital can call it state property or common property or private property or Peruvian property or bureaucratic state socialist property if they have good enough reason for doing so. They may have monopolized the means of production for five generations or for five years. They may organize and appropriate in open competition with each other or through their state. They may plan the economy and lead it to chaos or they may have simple old-fashioned chaos without plan. But from the juridical and metaphysical fiction of the abstract property relations to Stalin's new 15 year plan, all are to be analyzed and appraised only in the light of the primary social relation, the class struggle. Here you have two alternatives. You can say with the Cannonites that the proletariat is still the ruling class and Russia transitional to socialism by way of chaotic economy, the G.P.U., prisons as factories, factories as prisons, corruption of the international proletariat. That is criminal nonsense but it is logical and consistent crime. But you cannot like Shachtman call the bureaucracy a class whose state control "guarantees economic and political supremacy" and at the same time call Russia "a transitional and therefore unstable social order." American capitalism is an unstable but not a transitional social order. You can have a social order transitional to socialism or back to capitalism, with the proletariat as ruling class or struggling to maintain its position as ruling class. Or you can have another type of society with defined social relations. But both together? No. If you say with Shachtman that the bureaucracy is a class and "owns the state and therewith the state property" you are saying that the ruling class in Russia "owns" the means of production. What you are saying in reality is that the ruling class is in such a productive relation to the working class that the means of production thereby become capital. That is what Marx meant by saying that capital was conditioned on wage-labor. If you don't want that, then back to the old degenerated workers' state conception.

The relationship of capital and wage-labor has certain consequences. It constantly increases the misery, oppression and degradation of the workers. I can show, not only from the testimony of Victor Serge and Yvon, but from independent investigation of Stalinist sources, that the average income of the Russian workers which in 1936 was already less than it was in 1913, is today somewhere between 50 and 75 percent of the 1913 level, despite the manifold increase in production. The workers' oppressions, slavery and degradation are the worst in the world. Never before has there been a regime in which the gap has been so wide between what is preached and what is practised. The degradation of human personality has reached unbelievable depths. Socialism will be built by free men, not by driven slaves. Stalinist society can build only capitalist barbarism. And it is and will become more barbarous not in spite of but because of the immense centralisation of capital, this time in the hands of the state. That is precisely Marx's theory of increasing misery.

In 1936, Trotsky admitted that 15% of the population in Russia received roughly as much of the

national income as the remaining 85. Today that disproportion is infinitely wider, and approaches the distribution in capitalist states. Here we have, exemplified, Marx's theory of capitalist distribution. Distribution is merely the reverse or reflex of the social relations of production. Accumulation of wealth at one end of society and misery at the other is a law of all societies. But this process in slave society is entirely different to the process in capitalist society. *In capitalist society, misery and wealth accumulate directly because of the increasing productivity of labor.* Hence the dynamism of capitalist development and the long centuries of ancient and medieval stagnation. For historical reasons this movement has been tremendously accelerated in Russia. But the movement itself is strictly economic. It is illusory to hope that if given a chance, Stalin will change and raise the standard of living of the masses. That is Christianity, not Marxism. "The level of wages is not fixed by legislation but by economic factors." Stalin remains where he is because he knows better than to attempt any fundamental change in distribution without a fundamental change in class relations. Only when production is ruled by the producers themselves and, without too much delay, on an international scale, can the permanent crisis be resolved. When the crisis is suppressed economically it breaks out politically. It is suppressed politically by a gigantic apparatus of repression and wholesale massacre. Planned terror cements the planned economy. (Strange that the professional dialecticians cannot recognize the unity of these opposites!) Accumulation combined with misery are intertwined aspects of a unity – the process of capitalist production. On this rock Trotsky foundered. All who follow his path will suffer a similar fate with greater speed and less excuse.

Trotsky's Dilemma

... Trotsky says that there isn't enough to go round. But why do the workers get the short end? *Why does it grow worse every year?* Will it ever stop? The growing misery of the Russian workers is not due to preparations for the war. It is between 1935 and 1941 that the income of the bureaucracy in relation to the workers has reached the most fantastic heights. Like Brissot and Proudhon who made property an "independent relation," Trotsky is compelled to explain all by super-theft, by declaring that Stalin's state is organized nine-tenths for stealing and Stalin's supporters are thieves. That is useful as agitation. It is not analysis. The only explanation is that the predominance of wage-labor compels inevitable results.

Was there wage-labor in Leninist Russia? In form only; or yes and no, as is inevitable in a transitional state, but much more no than yes. The rule of the proletariat created a new *economy*. Whereas in a capitalist society the basic relationship is on the one hand wage-labor and on the other hand means of production in the hands of the capitalist class, in Leninist Russia the relationship was: the form of wage-labor only on the one hand because on the other were the means of production in the hands of the laborer who owned the property through the state. This made the class relations so different from those of capitalism as to alter the whole character and movement of wages and make Russia socialist "in principle." To lump this together with wage-labor in the Marxian sense is to believe that the way from New York to Montreal is the same as the way from New York to Miami. It is to miss completely the role of the Russian proletarian state in the transition period. The aim was to increase well-being instead of misery. Without world revolution workers' ownership was doomed. During the first Five Year Plan Stalin tried to abolish transition. It cost the lives of some ten million men. It is impossible here to trace the complicated economic development. But first the workers lost direct control; then the Stalinist constitution marked the end of even the pretense that the workers owned anything, and wage-labor therefore takes its unchecked course of increasing the misery of the Russian workers except for Stakhanovites and others whom Stalin bribes to support

his regime. This is exactly what Marx “foresaw”. ...

Today the bureaucracy, like any other capitalist class, in proportion to its political solidarity, plans in order to get as much surplus value as possible from the workers, it plans to preserve itself against other capitalist classes. An individual capitalist who is unable to extract surplus value goes bankrupt, gets a government subsidy, or allows his capital to lie fallow. The state, as national capitalist, produces in certain branches at a loss, which is atoned for by gain in others. Why is the total national capital any the less capital because it exploits the workers under unified control instead of in separate conflicting parts? The proof of this will be long in coming. It will involve a new *Capital*. The competition between capitalist and capitalist is a distinctly subordinate relation, a conflict over the distribution of the surplus value. Marx said so often. The decisive social relation is the antagonism between workers and capitalists over the production of the surplus value – the class struggle. It is not merely a more important relation than the rest. It *determines* the rest. Why else do we lay all our stress on the class struggle? Profit is only a “peculiar form” of surplus value. Surplus value can take the form of capitalist wages, “for quantity and quality of work performed” (in Russia today its distribution takes very unusual forms). But it can be produced in only one way. All analysis, research and theorizing, however “profound,” are useless unless they deal with these apparently very elementary but in reality decisive questions.

The Russian question is no isolated question but is the question of our economic epoch today. Marx and Engels taught that without the proletarian revolution the state would be *compelled* to take over capitalist property and make it state-owned... The German capitalist, with every social relation of production, wages, trade, profit, all controlled by the state, is little more than a state-functionary. This was accomplished by one agency in one way. How it will be done elsewhere, and by what stages, we do not and cannot know. There will be advances and retreats, even in Germany, but the whole moves inevitably towards state-ownership. Stalin, contrary to Trotsky’s persistent premonitions, strengthens state property, but if private property were restored in Russia tomorrow, it would inevitably be statified again. Socialization of the labor process proceeds apace in every country, with consequent socialization of exchange, and rigid regulation of every commodity, of which labor power is the chief. Today these conditions, or sheer chaos, demand statification, and they will have it. If the proletariat does not statify, the bourgeoisie will. But by so doing, it intensifies every contradiction of capitalism and drives society on the road to ruin. Of capitalist barbarism Stalinist Russia is a fore-runner. Under no circumstances is it to be defended.

10.3 H.H. Ticktin, Towards a Political Economy of the USSR (1974)

...

I take the view which I explain at some length later that the Soviet Union is neither state-capitalist nor workers’ state. I also do not agree with views like Mallet that a technocracy is taking over, or with Sweezy-Bettelheim that there is a state-bourgeoisie in power. The result is that a description of how the Soviet Union operates, what are its driving forces which follows is necessarily a critique of all these theories.

Any social system, and we must accept that the USSR is one, must have a central dynamic or drive and it seems to me that that special feature of the Soviet Union is that its drive self-contradictory. In other words we find not one central dynamic but one which is compounded of several conflicting laws or tendencies reflecting the social groups in the society. The central economic

feature of the USSR today is its enormous wastefulness and probably a tendency to increasing waste. The gap between the potential and the actual surplus, to use Sweezy-Baran, is undoubtedly rising fast but even the gap between the actual surplus and the amount utilised is growing. This, of course, is in part what all the marketeers are openly or obliquely referring to when they refer to the need for economic incentives to have a more rational economy. The question is why is there this enormous waste which goes very largely in the producer goods sector.

The answer it seems to me, lies in a conflict of interest between those who administer the economy centrally and those who deal with their instructions at the immediate or local level. During NEP there was a conflict between the plan and the market, but now, it seems to me, there is neither plan nor market and has not been for over forty years – if of course we understand the terms as particular production relations as any Marxist must. We have instead derivatives, which indeed began then. Preobrzhenky specifically refers in 1923 at the twelfth party congress to the parochial, commercial attitude of the Communist factory directors. The enterprise salaried staff take an attitude of trying to turn the central instructions to their own benefit and in so doing effectively negate the logic of the ‘plan’. The result is only a formal fulfillment. The situation would be much worse if this were not generally recognised so that the central organs in fact regard it as their task essentially to organise and co-ordinate an economy which is in fact out of their control. This represents a partial conflict among the elite themselves, which is one reason why it is difficult to call the top social group a class, although they have been moving in that direction. A primary reason why such an internal conflict can exist lies in the atomised nature of the society including the top social stratum. Effective communication is very difficult, information is distorted. The atomisation, however, is essential to maintain the regime or system in existence since discontent with the system is all-pervading and increasing. Since the waste is so great the standard of living rises only slowly so that the argument becomes a vicious circle. It is not just a vicious circle at the level of the elite but also represents a conflict on the same lines, though more extreme, between the intelligentsia and the elite as social organiser. The conflict of interest between the working class and the elite takes the form of the working class having no incentive to work. Consequently they do their utmost in a society where they are alienated in a transparent way, to do as little as possible, as badly as possible. There is as a result a contradiction between a tendency or law of organisation and a law which may be called transformed form of value or of self interest which the conflict with the working class takes the form of a collective withdrawal of labour in the only way possible. The result is massive overproduction of producer goods in spite of the desires of the administrators, This is not a historically viable system and is inherently unstable. There are in fact only two systems possible: the law of value which means profit, competition and the market, or socialism. Since the latter is ruled out as the elite are not prepared to lose their privileges the inevitable tendency is to the market and to an immediate worsening of the position of the working class. Because of the political problems of the latter situation the Soviet Union has nowhere to go other than repression together with gradual attempts at the market.

We now turn to my own approach to the USSR. To a large extent I have had a unique experience, having lived there for close to five years while being consciously critical i.e. with the concepts, which we have just outlined. As a result I shall be drawing on this experience since one’s approach is bound to be conditioned by one’s own environment. I shall do it in the same way in which we are forced to do the same in Britain where many of the facts of our class divided society are hidden from researchers and can never be quantitatively established, as in the case of income distribution. There is of course far more that is unwritten in the USSR and consequently such an approach is essential if anything both true and meaningful is to be said. This does not mean that facts from Soviet sources

cannot be quoted in support, they often can, but the concepts and the integrative theory, however, modified by the written material may be obtained by observation and discussion at any rate in raw form.

First I propose to discuss what I regard as the central contradiction of the Soviet political economy or social structure. Then I shall go into the means of social control or, if you want, the means of mediating the social conflict in the USSR.

Accumulation and Waste

Cliff, Mattick and others have been correct to point to accumulation as perhaps the major factor of Soviet political economy. Where they leave the rails, probably because they have not bothered to read the Russian literature even such as there is in translation, is where they attribute it all to the question of defence. ...

If we return then to accumulation we are left with the question of why investment in non-military goods should rise to the point where apparently there would be no room for consumer goods, and the engineering industry continues to increase at a much faster rate than light industry, with apparently so little effect on the standard of living. It is not a question of the rates of growth but of why food remains the major problem of most of the population and the housing norm stays little bigger than the space for a coffin (as in popular parlance). When this has been the case for 40 years there is clearly a fundamental force at work which Marxists might call a law. Originally it is clear that industrialisation moved the population base from the country to the towns and when combined with collectivisation it effectively ended the political importance of the countryside. Today although 40% live in the villages something under 30% are peasants obtaining their living from the countryside and when one takes account of the sexual imbalance of the countryside, the number of families totally engaged in agriculture is even smaller. Today concessions to the peasantry signify only the need for the towns to have more food not any desire to assuage their discontent. Industrialisation and collectivisation broke forever the political power of the Soviet peasant and established the Soviet elite or at that time bureaucracy. Independently of their wills, however, they created a system, not a socio-economic formation, which has continued with many of its features intact. No doubt the producer goods industry being in big units is more controllable and requires more of a bureaucracy but this is more of a secondary reason. The fact of the matter is that the elite have declared time and again that more consumer goods must be produced. So in 1934 at the 17th party congress the production of consumer goods was to be radically increased and the quality of production improved as an immediate task. At the nineteenth party congress in 1952 we once again hear of a substantial rise of living standards to be the essential aim of the plan. Today again the Soviet leaders have said that living standards must be raised and quality must be improved. Almost 50 years ago, in the period of the goods famine, Preobrazhensky, among other Marxists pointed to the need to increase the output of consumer goods in order to stabilise the USSR economy. While he differed from Bukharin in the rate of growth of heavy industry required they were as one in the need for relatively quick returns. Preobrazhensky's warning of accumulation in 1931 can be seen to have been prophetic.

The fact is, then, that Soviet planners, as representatives of the Soviet elite, would like to raise the output of all consumer goods as fast as possible, but they are hindered partially by the arms drive but to a very large degree by the nature of the internal system of the USSR. In a situation where people subjectively wish to change the system but cannot do so we must conclude that there is some social law lying beyond their will to change. If we try to find it, the first brutal fact which

we notice is the enormous waste in the USSR economy. This leads to a defence cost much higher than would be needed in a rational economy. In this case, the economy could be either capitalist or socialist, both would have less waste in general, and in defence in particular. The waste of resources is so enormous that one of the liberal establishment economists said that 30-50% increase in production would follow the introduction of a less irrational economic system. If he says 30-50% it could easily be 5 to 10 times his figure.

1. In the first place there is the basic factor of low quality production. The worst is not that Soviet consumer goods last less long than their Western counterparts or indeed than their original designers intended, or even that special warehouses have had to be built to take the overflow of products unwanted because of their irregularity of operation. This is wasteful enough, but the effects are felt more widely when it applies to the producer goods sector. When more people are involved in the repair of machinery than either making it, or than in the production of consumer goods in spite of exhortations from the so-called planners and all sorts of quality incentives applied to minimum effect over 50 years, it is clear that poor quality is at the heart of the economy system. ...

To summarise; poor quality production leads to a need for considerably more of the goods being demanded, a tremendous and insatiable demand for spare parts and a repair industry that has begun to feed on itself in that the repairs are both poorly done and at much higher cost than required. Some people may say that the workers in the USSR are peasants. But it is now over 40 years since the first five year plan. Are the grandsons of peasants also peasants? The working class in the USSR is at least comparable to that in Japan and yet they do not handle machinery in a way to ensure that minimum use might be made of it or yet take a pride in poor quality production. The reason has little to do with the past but a lot to do with the economic system. ...

2. A second form of waste in the USSR lies in the very slow introduction of new technology. Mandel speaks of the superiority of a socialist system in being able to introduce new technology quicker and then goes on to adduce the example of the USSR. Nothing could be more correct when applicable to the future socialist system but less applicable to the Soviet Union. In fact there is a negative incentive system or positive disincentive for the introduction of new technology. This is only a standard fact for anyone engaged in a study of the USSR economy but it is of great importance to note the way it occurs. As long as there is a basic indicator whether it be physical output or profits new technology when introduced must disrupt this success indicator. Any new product or process has numerous problems to be solved or ironed out in mass production. The example of Rolls Royce has made it very clear but whereas in the West the risks involved are often proportionately rewarded or it is accepted that only a proportion of the total invested will bear fruit, in the USSR there is no equivalent incentive for this risk. Many different forms of bonuses have been introduced and continue to exist but by its nature the effect on production is unpredictable so that no real incentive system can exist as long as the basic output indicators exist in real or value terms. Even if profit is an indicator, unless the enterprise is free to dismiss workers rendered redundant and prices are raised to reflect supply and demand the introduction of new technology or a new product may actually mean an increase in costs uncompensated by price. ...

3. This leads to the third important source of waste in the economy: the enormous number of people who are underemployed. One prominent economist inside the USSR in a speech reprinted subsequently is reputed to have put the figure at 15 million individuals who could effectively be removed from production and output would be either unaffected or go up – a quarter of production workers, or more. It arises partly from the fact that today no-one can be dismissed as redundant so that the introduction of new technology leads to the employment of new skilled workers as well as the old so increasing costs when any change is introduced. The result has been that over the past

few years experiments have been taking place with redundancies. The Party Central Committee declared at the end of 1970 that the Shchekinskii redundancy experiment should be generalised (in which workers were effectively found other jobs) but since they did not repeal the law on dismissals the effect so far has been minimal. They have also been talking at length of getting women to stay at home to look after the children so reducing the labour force since 90% of women work. In addition there is real unemployment. In 1964-5 it was at fairly high levels but even today because of the restriction on labour mobility and difficulty of obtaining jobs in particular towns it is not insignificant. ...

Causes of Waste

The last statement requires to be explained. Because the centre has little real information and only its most detailed and explicit instructions are actually followed, enterprises, by and large, simply follow the logic of the bonus-indicator-social reward system. Even though a lower output may be required by the centre, overfulfilment will automatically arise wherever it is possible and be duly rewarded while the consumer good sector being at the end of the chain will not receive the necessary resources. The extra parts and goods available will be immediately absorbed either by plants waiting or by storage depots of the enterprises in case of short supply in the future. There would then be a further clamour for new plants to produce goods in short supply. Workers with lower targets would work at lower rates. This sounds like a system out of control and that is what precisely what it is. Apart from the dozen or so indicators set by the centre such as steel, coal power etc. the rest of the centre's job is largely organisational: to see that the economy does not collapse or if you prefer runs more smoothly. Their information is poor and the enterprise salaried personnel being only interested in maximising their own personal welfare will fulfil the formal instructions only, even that often results in an absurdity. Faced with a situation where it is to their benefit to maximise an indicator, whether it is called profit or anything else they will wrongly inform the centre as to their potential and produce a product mix most suitable to themselves. If it is total output they will produce low quality useless goods of the correct amount, if it is total value sold they will produce high cost goods in the greatest demand, still of low quality in the absence of competition, and if it is profit they will use the worst quality materials for the job i.e. with lowest cost, spend the least time possible and produce a product of highest possible price and most immediate sale like the forging of ikons, or shoes with minute quantities of leather while avoiding the production of items which must take some time to sell as books. It is not that everyone is not aware of what should be produced or how it should be produced or what product mix is preferable. The enterprise staff know very well but it is not in their interest.

In other words not being able to be controlled from the centre the economy is not planned but administered. Liberman put the issue this way: "The old system of economic management was well suited to the attainment of its chief aim, to mobilize resources and concentrate them on the most urgent needs of the state. It was mainly aimed at quantitative, extensive growth of production." The problem as I have shown by quotation is still there and the introduction of profit will not by itself change the situation. To have a planned economy there must be conscious control of the society and economy by the democratic representatives of the majority – the working class. If this is absent a series of conflicts and interests is set up both between and inside social groups with the result that the instructions of the central planners are only implemented in so far as they conform to the personal interest of the individuals while the elite planners receive only distorted information. As a result the basic conception of planning as facilitating a more rational organisation of the

economy is lost. For that reason the viewpoint of those who regard the USSR as a workers' state or socialist because it is planned or planning as at any rate one of the symptoms are barking up the wrong tree. It is an organised or administered economy, with most of the economy under no-one's control. From the above quotation of Liberman it is clear that this is not a view unshared in the USSR and indeed a number of Western economists have come to the same view. The problem with most of these people, however, is that they pose the problem in a fetishized way ignoring the social relations involved. Not being Marxists they also do not attempt to see the essential dynamic and laws operating in the system.

Historically it is clear that the organisation of the economy through a means which was at times little more than organised terror served to ensure a degree of industrialisation of the economy. Beyond that point, however, the only result has been that the system is producing increasing waste in spite of all attempts by the elite to halt the process. Waste is increasing because a more complex economy and modern industry demands greater exactness both in time and quality. Original industrialisation was enormously wasteful, pyramid-building, largely in terms of lives, but a modern industrialised economy requires intensive development. The more intensive and the more complex is the economy the longer the chain of command, and the less intelligible is industry to the administrators, and so the greater the distortions and their proportionate importance. The waste itself occurs because of a fundamental conflict between the need to organise the economy, and the self-interest of the individuals of the elite and intelligentsia. As I have been arguing it is fundamentally wrong to argue in terms of a conflict between planning or the law of planning and the market or law of value. Since there is effectively little more than an attempt to avoid waste squeezing out all consumption, the organisation of today has little in common with Preobrazhensky's concept of planning. The original conflict existed during NEP and reflected the social classes of the period so that a statement that planning or the law of planning in some sense exists today is nothing more than a more esoteric way of saying that there is in some sense a worker's state. It is time we updated our ideas especially when we realise that the social groups which came into existence are not the same as those in 1928-9. If we argue from the actual situation we have to recognise a different form of conflict deriving from this original conception of Preobrazhensky. Instead of a law of planning we can talk of a law of organisation which expresses the requirement of the elite that their occupations and privileges be maintained through the functioning of the economy. This is also essential to maintain their existence as a social group. Mandel has stated and I quote "the bureaucracy has not political social or economic means at its disposal to make the defense of its own specific material interests coincide with the mode of production from which it draws its privileges." If we ignore for the time being some of the terms, the statement appears very dubious. The elite in so far as they fulfill their organisational tasks as managers and administrators, economic, political or military, do in fact ensure that production is developed. The fact that they at first used naked force and terror to this end alters nothing, still less that it is not so far below the surface today. I would go further and state that in the absence of the tasks performed by the present Soviet elite – mobilisation, force and co-ordination, production would probably drop to a negative quantity. Mandel then maintains with Trotsky that the bureaucracy provide the basic dynamic of the system through their consumer interests. If this were all it becomes difficult to understand why there has been any development at all in the USSR. It would appear that it is occurring in spite of those who administer the economy but by whom? Growth does not happen mystically. Much has been made of scarcity by persons holding this view, but the elite for some time now has had incomes comparable with their opposite numbers in the West. If all they needed was to consume, they would trade Russian timber for British or more probably German consumer goods. In so far as they act

in their own self interest it is mediated by their occupation which amounts to administering the society. A member of the capitalist class also acts in his own interests when he accumulates surplus value. The essential point is that they perform a certain social function in production which leads to the formation of a production relation. It should not be thought that the members of the elite are unaware of the contradiction between their own instructions and their fulfilment. On the contrary, they operate on the basis of non-fulfilment, of contradictory results to what is required. As a result they do perform an essential role in the existing system. If they were removed there would either be total collapse or another system.

The forms of waste outlined all have their basis in the antagonistic relations of a section of the elite, the intelligentsia and the working class in relation to the elite as a social group. That the basis of the contradictions lies in the self-interest, immediately expressed does not say that they are all interested in consumption. The essential point lies in the statement of Preobrazhensky: that the USSR had not the advantages of socialism but had lost the advantages of the capitalist economy. If we translate this to the present day, this means that there is no incentive system which can work other than one which is capitalist or socialist. The incentive for the factory manager is on the one hand, his monetary reward conditional on fulfilling the success indicators, and on the other, the privileges and promotion which goes with a correct interpretation of the economic and political situation. It is because both these factors are at play that the centre's instructions are not simply caricatured. It is not an historical accident that the economic system is self-contradictory. It is a reflection of the insecurity of the regime itself. Anyone who has read some of the work of the Soviet underground or has lived there any period of time has noted the all-pervading discontent present in the USSR. No doubt there are persons who are nationalists, anti-semites and those who are naturally docile but because the production relations are transparent most individuals in inferior social positions are dissatisfied with the system. Elite members are themselves dissatisfied because of the inefficiency of the system and the tight control needed. The only way the system can be maintained is through the effective atomisation of the population. This is achieved by the secret police operating through a series of means of social control conscious or unconscious. The essential point here is that the population is not able to effectively communicate at a level required to deal with essential problems in the economy. The effect is that no-one wants to report unpalatable information, no-one wants to take responsibility. In other words as between the enterprise director and the centre there is an impenetrable barrier which is rendered still worse because of a similar barrier existing both among individuals and among the social groups, the intelligentsia and the working class. It is, therefore, inevitable that each person will perform the minimum required whatever stimuli are introduced other than the introduction of a full scale market with all its social consequences. It is not a question of the law of value in operation but of each individual being privatised to a degree higher than has ever been experienced in any other society. The interests of the individual stand in sharp contrast to the apparent interests of the society, indeed in sharper contrast than in capitalist society. This attitude is most clearly demonstrated when Soviet emigres arrive and mostly proceed to show their sympathy for the right often the extreme right as the representatives of the rights of the individual.

At the level of society the contradiction expresses itself as an atomised society, atomised for stability, which must be integrated in order to function and this is done by elite organisation or what is called planning. It might also be expressed as a law of organisation both complementing and opposing a law of private benefit or interest.

Law of Value

The law of value has not been brought in till now to avoid confusion but a few comments must be made. For there to be the production of surplus value there clearly must be value and for there to be value there must be exchange. What Soviet economists say on this can be regarded less as descriptions of reality than as projections of what they would like to see. In any case there are all schools of thought from those who do not see the law of value operating to those who see it in the full panoply of its powers. Because of the censorship they cannot admit that the restrictions are far greater and qualitatively different from those under monopoly capitalism. In the first place distribution, which some people see as being under the law of value, is to a large extent direct. Housing being allocated by the local factory or town soviet with a rent which is so close to zero as to make no difference is effectively outside its operation with certain exceptions. In regard to food, those who have money and can use it are the fortunate. For most of the population particularly outside the biggest towns two things are more important than money: time (to stand in queues) and the right contact to obtain the food. This is not to speak of the not inconsiderable sector which grows it themselves. The private plot is widespread outside agriculture. In the second place since the prices fixed by the state have no relation to the cost and in the case of many consumer durables in so far as they exist are so great as to exclude purchase by the majority, their money has little value. For that reason a bonus of an extra 5 or ten rubles a month for most workers is meaningless. The one thing they will not do is work harder in response to such an incentive. Money which can hardly be spent is of not much use. Nor can it even serve as a store of value in view of the way the Soviet state has in the past refused to repay government debt to the population and arbitrarily devalued the internal currency, not to speak of the effect of enormous price jumps. Further, the real distribution differences as between the social groups are made in direct and natural form. Thus for instance the elite obtains its housing, chauffeur driven cars and de facto private cars, food, clothing, health, holidays etc. either free or at very low prices in their own special shops. It should not be believed that it applies only to the central committee, factory managers, army officers, the KGB all have their own supply institutions. Distribution in other words relates to social group directly through state allocation or through direct contact.

Within production itself, without competition, profit is nothing other than a technical phenomenon, targets are essentially based on physical indicators to this day and purchase and sale between enterprises are largely accounting phenomena. If then the law of value operates, it is so distorted as to be unrecognisable. Indeed the whole demand for the market would be unintelligible if the law of value already existed. Those who have studied this debate have long realised that the different Soviet schools, in order to legitimise what they wanted, had to declare that it already existed. If the law of value already exists in large measure then you are only asking that it take a more rational form. The sale of flats at prices which the workers cannot afford becomes easier to justify just as the production and sale of cars for the intelligentsia at high prices can be accepted as a rational extension of the existing pricing system. This is what is now happening but it must be recognised as a major change in the social system. The proposed introduction of the market may appear as a technical phenomenon to the fetishized Western (or Eastern) economist whether he calls himself a socialist or not, but it involves the ordinary member of the intelligentsia obtaining significant benefits at the expense of the working class. To sum up: if you start off with the assumption of the law of value being dominant in the USSR no doubt you will never be dissuaded (Naville, Cliff, Mattick) but the distorted form in which it is then seen to exist, means that these authors spend more time explaining the deviations than in discussing the trends in the society.

It appears to me more useful and correct to regard the USSR as a society which historically

overthrew capitalism but had its own dictatorship of the proletariat removed. The result is the existence of remnants of both formations. The effect has been to create an economic system of its own type with these survivals clearly traceable but also lacking the fundamental drives of both formations. It has therefore a higher level of contradiction than in any socio-economic formation. I shall show how this applies to the so-called bureaucracy and to the working class.

The Bureaucracy and the Working Class

Trotsky made a lot of sense when he referred to the existence of a bureaucracy ruling the Soviet Union before his exile and possibly for a number of years afterwards. Since the thirties, however, with the basic industrialisation of the USSR it is not true that everyone who works in the Soviet party or the government machine is privileged in terms either of income or of power. It was true in a period of generalised want that anyone who had a job in an office was much better off than anyone else who did not have those features. He also, because of the lack of complexity of the Soviet economy and few specialists, was *de facto* in a position of control. These characteristics have not been present for decades now. The ordinary officials in the apparatus who handle the millions of applications made in the course of a year receive less than industrial workers and when there is a decision to be made which does not fit the instructions in handbooks he will not make it. There are now more than 14 million party members and it is not difficult to show that close to half of the male intelligentsia belongs to it and yet their wage and position is in many cases not much better than the ordinary semi-skilled worker. In other words the ruling and privileged group in the USSR is only a part of what is called the bureaucracy – it is its own elite.

I have called it an elite not a class for two reasons. In the first place historically, until twenty years ago, the rate of mobility was so high into the elite or highest social group, that this social group had not acquired sufficient cohesion to talk of a class. This as I have implied is no longer so today, social mobility both in and out of the elite is much reduced while its common interests have become more prominent. Nonetheless still today it is true to say that it is an internally contradictory social group. The socio-economic conflict between organisation and private interest exists within the elite itself making it an unstable group. Sections of it are indeed repressed, even if not to the same degree as the ordinary member of the intelligentsia. It is not necessarily a question as some authors as Parkin or Mallet seem to think of the technocracy taking control. If one looks at the composition of the Central Committee one is immediately struck by the high proportion of engineers on it as well as by the very high proportion who have higher education. It is also dubious whether one can talk of different interests on that basis, as if some want efficiency and others do not. The essential difference lies between those who have to administer the society as a whole and consequently have to subordinate their immediate interests and those who do not. If the economic reforms require much higher prices of meat which would effectively make more meat available to those with more money but less for the working class, so leading to increased work for the secret police, they will think twice about the introduction of such measures. Nor do we have to assume as do some authors that the men at the top are bound to what exists as under another, more efficient, market system they would be out of a job. On the contrary these men have skills which would be needed under any system but probably no less in a market system where the role of the organiser is not unknown. The contradiction which exists in the elite is at the heart of the system.

In the second place, since the time of Trotsky there has grown up a 9 million strong army of graduates who constitute what amounts to a separate social group with its own interests. At its higher levels it is part of the elite but the rest are excluded from power and have a standard

of living not much higher than that of the working class and often indeed lower. It is they who would benefit most from the economic reforms and they who wish to change the economic system most. They are the most privatised and the most opposed to organisation, and they identify central administration and organisation with socialism. Not unsurprisingly they are the group most in favour of capitalism itself, usually in the form of an uncritical admiration for the United States and the effects of private enterprise. Not to anyone's astonishment the current five year plan proposes to increase their incomes faster than the working class, in order to assuage their discontent. Marxist theorists have acted up to now as if this social group has never come into being, as if they play the same role in the USSR as they do in the West. Where the means of production are nationalised power is exercised through occupational positions so that those like the intelligentsia who are not at the top of occupational ladder constitute a distinct social group based on their position in the division of labour in the society. Since they are physically separate from the working class and essentially compete with them for a division of the means of distribution and regard themselves as inherently entitled to a standard of living higher than the working class the two groups have hitherto stood in sharp opposition to each other. It is in large part a result of the atomisation of society that the working class and intelligentsia are separated by an enormous social distance. The effect has been to stabilise an otherwise highly unstable system. Since the intelligentsia are highly elitist and are only interested in their own individual affairs they are cut off from the only force which can change the society and hence become extremely pessimistic, mystical (the Russian soul, believers in God) and nationalistic. The elite have therefore succeeded in maintaining the system in spite of itself. This is, of course, not its only means. The working class, despising as a result the intelligentsia, can be relied on to support the elite against the demands of the intelligentsia.

The intelligentsia, as indeed the society, is divided by a sexual exploitation which performs a similar mediating role to that of the negroes in the United States. The least well paid jobs among the intelligentsia and the working-class are performed by women. The almost total employment of women in the Soviet Union is part of what I have called a historical survival of the dictatorship of the proletariat but it has been undermined and almost turned into its opposite by the overwhelming proportion of women engaged in the least prestigious, least responsible jobs in the least important sectors of the economy. As a result men by and large receive on average at least 50 per cent more than women in pay. Their larger pay and more responsible position is a direct consequence of the exploitation of women in the society. Quota systems and exclusions exist for certain faculties and jobs for women and, incidentally, Jews.

Finally I should like to discuss the contradiction between the working-class and the elite. I have argued that, as there is a conflict between self interest and organisation, it takes an extreme form as between the intelligentsia and the elite resulting in action of the type I have described at a factory level. At least the intelligentsia has its own benefit to promote: the working class has with certain exceptions at the fringes no incentive at all in production. It has found itself in a situation where the relations of production are transparent, where the privileges of the elite are obvious but it is atomised so that only occasional and spontaneous action is possible. The inevitable result is that production is done at the minimum level possible and since there is effectively neither sanction nor reward as they cannot be dismissed nor receive effective monetary compensation for extra effort they produce goods at the lowest possible quality with the slowest speed and minimum effort. If not for the competitive campaigns and drives for higher quality, it is dubious whether very much more would be produced from year to year. This provides another basic reason for why taut plans always remain taut: the worker will adjust downwards but only with great difficulty upwards. To summarize; the worker alienates his labour in such a way as to maximize the waste in the economy

and society. Effectively he is controlled through the internal passport which does not allow movement to the bigger towns, through a labour book, through a secret file and through the operations of the KGB in the plant not to speak of his place of residence, given by the plant. If one wishes to say that all this exists under capitalism he will be wrong. Such a degree of control as exists in the USSR has never existed anywhere.

A surplus is undoubtedly extracted from the worker which is to a large extent waste but that this be called wage-labour with the extraction of surplus value presupposes an exchange while the whole burden of what I have been saying is that there is only an enforced unity in production with a dubious return for both sides. There is a more or less transparent and enforced extraction of the surplus but it makes as much sense to call it wage-labour – surplus value as to call it feudalism. On the other hand it should be clear from what I have said that the elite in no sense can be said to be acting in the interest of the working class. In so far as the regime is in the interests of the working-class, as in terms of slack production discipline, this is only because the working class will tolerate nothing else. What the working class maintains it does almost in the same way as trade unions do in the West: through non-co-operation or direct action: strikes. A movement to the market would undoubtedly lead to income redistribution away from the working-class, unemployment and tighter labour discipline not to speak of higher prices for food. In so far as it has been introduced this is what has already happened but this should neither be understood as capitalism nor move away further from a worker's state. In its inherent logic it is a step towards capitalism as it will really introduce the capitalist incentive system Based on profit and competition together with unemployment. At the same time the intelligentsia will be better off and the elite more secure. This is the trend and it is an inevitable trend only essentially halted today because the working class will not tolerate it, but the working class is in the contradiction that the existing system is sinking deeper into crisis – this years' harvest failure is no accident and waste is simply increasing so that if the market is not introduced they will probably gain little in the long run. Their only solution is socialism, the revolutionary overthrow of the ruling elite in Russia.

10.4 Christopher Arthur, Epitaph for the USSR: A Clock Without a Spring (2002)

It is important following the 'fall' to point out that the debate over the nature of the Soviet Union is still germane to socialist theory and practice. Analysis of no-longer-existing socialism is significant more generally, for it is clear that the lessons are not specific to the extremes of the Russian situation, but are relevant to the theory and practice of transition in general.

Indeed the question of what a real and permanent supersession of capitalism requires is now more pressing. Anyone interested in such a question must draw from the lessons of this failed attempt. And, anyone who is a Marxist must give an account of 'what went wrong' consonant with Marxist theory itself.

...

Let us now turn to those post-revolutionary systems that have claimed to have superseded capitalism – in brief, the 'Soviet model'.

As far as social form is concerned capitalism was destroyed in the USSR. It is not meaningful to speak of the system as having had value, surplus value, or capital accumulation (it should go without saying that development of heavy industry is not itself any sign of capital accumulation). There was the price form, and the wage form, but this in no way represented some appearance-form

of value, since these forms were rather fixed within a totally administered system. (Although of course such forms provide a point of transition to capitalism when political conditions dictate, as we see today.)

What remained, however, was the materialisation of capital, namely the factory system. For various historical reasons this was never questioned: socialism was proclaimed without radically overcoming the material embodiment of capital. Hence the global factory in the USSR started from this capitalist model, of which the key element is the hierarchical division of labour: from those at the bottom who execute the orders of others, to those involved in the five-year plan process.

The entire human/material configuration of capital's technique was replicated. But without the objective economic regulator of value measures. A factory is not a mode of production. It has to be specified further by what social form it is regulated. As the factory system was laid down through capital's own development it followed that, once separated from capital itself as a social form, this content lost the character of being a content and became a material foundation of the new order. The great difference with capitalism is that the lack of an objective value regulator leaves the mechanism without a spring, i.e. there is no drive for capital accumulation. Furthermore, without being continually regulated by capital this material presupposition ceased to be posited by capital as its presupposition and hence became subject to a kind of 'drift' – the Soviet factory became unlike capitalist factories in many respects. (See the informative studies by Ticktin, Filtzer, Arnot and Fiiredi.)

What was this new social form? It was certainly not socialism. Rather, the requirements of the inherited material basis for some kind of direction led with extraordinary rapidity to a bureaucratic dictatorship. As Ticktin has pointed out, to speak here of a 'planned economy' is wildly inaccurate, for the basic information and monitoring systems were not in place because of the antagonism between planners and planned. At most one can speak of an administered economy within which enterprise managers and workers survived as best they could. If it had been planned there would have been a good 'fit' between form and content, and it would have survived. The trouble arose precisely because the materialisation of capital was freed from capital's controlling form, but without another organic system of social metabolism taking root and transforming more or less rapidly and radically the material basis of the economy. Being neither capitalism nor socialism the USSR lacked organic coherence. According to Ticktin 'there are only capitalism and its essence, the law of value, and socialism with its essence, the law of planning; anything in between... has no essence, no laws except ones of formation and decay.'

This paradoxical character is expressed by Ticktin when he says it was not a mode of production at all (a fortiori neither 'state capitalism' nor 'bureaucratic collectivism'). The politically enforced directives were incapable of controlling the factories in such a manner as to promote the development of the productive forces in a stable and permanent fashion.

Lenin (surprisingly for such a political thinker) was enthusiastic about the 'scientific management' pioneered theoretically by Taylor and practically by Ford. But the truth is that Taylorism was never applied in the USSR! (Stakhanovism, besides being purely a publicity stunt, was not scientific in Taylor's sense.) The Soviets had no theoretical objection to it: they wanted to apply scientific management, but they were unable to do so because production was governed by a non-capitalist social form. It could not be applied in the USSR because it was tailor-made for capitalism. It is not, as Lenin seemed to imagine, a socially neutral body of knowledge. Moreover, Taylor would roll in his grave if anyone dared to associate him with the gross over-manning characteristic of Soviet industry. Fiat built a factory for the Soviets: it took four times as many workers to run as exactly the same factory in Italy.

The Soviet system was not a labour-saving system but a labour-hoarding one. Clearly where it was illegal to fire workers, managers had not much interest in saving labour time. Furthermore they could not organise a just-in-time system because in the USSR supply was never in time. Hence it was important to build up and hoard stocks against such a drying up of supply for more or less long periods. Thus Soviet production worked on the 'never-in-time' system: it took most of the month to get the machinery in order, and the inputs delivered. Then, to meet the monthly targets, the factory engaged in a process known as 'storming' when everyone available worked until they dropped. Then another hiatus occurred, and so it would go on. In fact managers hoarded labour in case a period of 'storming' was required to meet a plan deadline. I do not think Taylor would call this scientific management! Certainly the workers did not like the hanging about or the storming. And the consumer discovers the products of storming are defective. In sum Taylorism makes no sense when workers jobs are guaranteed.

The inefficiency of the central planning system, combined with the absence of a market, resulted in a paradoxical retrogression in the social division of labour. Fiiredi explains: 'The response of individual production units to the problem caused by the absence of economic regulation is to strive for a measure of self-sufficiency. Thus instead of a mutually beneficial division of labour between enterprises, industries and regions, the pattern is for the division of labour to be reproduced within each sector of the economy.' Hence, there was a fragmentation of the economy and inefficiency. Because 'the goal of any enterprise manager is to reduce his reliance on the overall division of labour to a minimum, to give the best chance of reaching centrally imposed performance targets', resources were kept hidden from the planners and thus they could not effectively plan for they did not know where the resources were.

I have said, following Ticktin, that there was no mode of production in the USSR. This purely negative definition does not mean much, except as a promissory note on its collapse. Let me try to give the theory more substance.

What is a mode of production? It is a stable, relatively harmonious, combination of a social form and a material content. In Marx's glib aphorism, 'the handmill gives us society with the feudal lord, the steam mill society with the industrial capitalist'. It must be understood that, in the combination, the elements are not indifferent to one another, nor do they exhibit a one-way determination (the Marx passage has been misread as a technological determinism), rather they are dialectically interrelated. Just this form shapes and develops just this content; just this content embodies and reproduces materially just this form. Thus it is the social form of capital that, through its tendency towards competition and enlarged production, brought forth the steam engine. And it was the enormous boost to labour productivity occasioned by it that enabled capitalism to stomp all over pre-capitalist forms. If the social form and material content come into contradiction this spells trouble. For example, we believe that the increasing socialisation of the productive forces, and associated labour processes, will prove incompatible with their capitalist integument.

What I argue is that the relations of production in the USSR always suffered from an incoherence of form and content. It was a self-aborting monstrosity. The matter is not unrelated to its inauspicious beginnings. Apart from the much canvassed political dimensions, the isolated USSR had not the human and technical resources to avoid copying capitalist technique. But when the factory is brought under a quite different social form characterised by the absence of capital's logic, and by employment guarantees, productivity goes out of the window, exploitation is inefficient, and control must be exercised in a new way, i.e., by a bureaucratic apparatus backed up by a police state. This was then reinforced and reproduced as the emerging bureaucracy opted for maintaining their own position at the head of a hierarchical command structure.

The interests of the capitalist are congruent with the growth of social wealth, but the individual interest of the bureaucrat is not. This is why there was no new mode of production. Adam Smith showed long ago that the capitalist benefited society simply in pursuit of his own interest. The interest of the worker, however, was not so self-evidently connected with social wealth. Doubling productivity is immediately in the interests of the capitalist, but it leaves up to half the workforce unemployed.

Now, bourgeois apologists may argue that the increase in social wealth will somehow generate new industries to re-employ these people, but this is a very indirect link and the workers may be forgiven for trying to hold on to the jobs they have. The argument for socialism has always appealed to the idea that when the workers work 'for themselves' they will become interested in increasing production, and it will be possible to reorganise the technology of the factory to gain the full benefit of this. But in the USSR the factory provided no avenue for workers' initiative and in any case their exclusion from control over the surplus gave them no guarantee that such efforts would benefit themselves or their families.

Thus far, it is not much different from capitalism. But, it is in fact worse than capitalism as the individual bureaucrat had no immediate interest of his own in increasing social wealth either. Remember they were not stock holders in the industries under their control. Their rewards depended upon political favour. Hence the resistance to innovation, the tendency to pass the buck and blame others when things went wrong, the hoarding of labour and materials against a future episode of 'storming'. What a bureaucrat wants is, above all, a quiet life. The reason for what happened was not 'the adoption of Taylorism', but the necessity to maintain distinctions to justify bureaucratic privilege and prevent the self-organisation of the workers.

If we return to basics we must start the social analysis not from the form of state, but from the form of production. It was not production for profit; it was not production for need; it was production for targets which were laid down external to the logic of the production process itself. In the case of capitalism we know that the law of value transmits from factory to factory the socially necessary labour times for any item, and that capital flows and technological innovation are mutually reinforcing.

In the case of production for need we might imagine some mutually informative institutionalisation of producer/consumer relations. But the USSR had no such feed back loops! The targets had no relation to real needs or, more importantly, the real resources and the real capabilities of the factories. No five year plan ever succeeded, but had to be drastically reworked year on year. The so-called plans were meaningless because the information available was so corrupted by the political distortions of the system. And where the plan was fulfilled it was often only in the letter and not the substance. The state interfered in the economy, but the system did not regulate itself in accordance with some inherent logic of its productive capacity.

Thus, I argue that the well-known phenomenon of a rapid expansion of basic factors of production followed by chronic paralysis when diverse sophisticated products were required should not be interpreted as effects of some economic law, but rather as a sign of a lack of law. A combination of political factors (coercion and voluntarist enthusiasm) got things off the ground. But because no new mode of production was stabilised, the system could not run itself when these political pressures diminished.

Although the general run of commodities were defective, the system was capable of prioritising allocation of materials, machinery and men to certain uses – that is why it worked in war, and why the concentration of scarce resources, and the best talent, in the armament sector could produce Sputnik (of course the presence of imperialism forced this priority on the system, which otherwise

might have been more rewarding for certain layers of the population). While there was considerable extensive growth this process itself was enormously wasteful. But the crucial problem was the retardation of intensive growth. Citing just one problem: how can the intellectual productive forces be developed on a broad scale when the rulers did not trust the masses with photocopyers?

In order to make more plausible the claim that no mode of production existed in the USSR let us observe that Ernest Mandel distinguished between specific relations of production, which must characterise any social formation, and a mode of production. This is 'one of the essential distinctions between periods of transition and the great 'progressive stages' of history outlined by Marx'. (To comprehend this distinction, it is important to keep in mind that a mode of production is an organic whole that reproduces itself almost automatically. It can only be replaced by violent social revolution.) Mandel continues:

On the other hand, precisely because of their generally hybrid character the relations of production of a society in transition between two modes of production can decompose of their own accord, evolve in various directions without necessarily experiencing revolutionary perturbations of the same type as the social revolutions necessary for the passage from one mode of production to another.

So there were certainly relations of production of a sort, but there was no organic system of social metabolism.

The whole experience demonstrates the wisdom of Marx's insight that economics is decisive over politics. The elite wanted to be a true ruling class, and it seemed they had all the power anyone could wish for, with the KGB, the Gulag, and the house-trained party millions. But they could not ground themselves on production. They poured out 'plans', 'decrees', 'orders', 'reforms', but they could not deliver the goods – it was as simple as that.

To summarise this sketch of history: in the pre-capitalist period the form of capital emerged. In the capitalist period it seized hold of production and shaped this matter into a content adequate to it. In the post-capitalist period this form of capital was extinguished however, its material presuppositions were not radically transformed but merely administered within new social relations, resulting in an uncontrolled process of deformation of the material basis in the context of a continued failure for the form and matter to achieve a new organicity.

Week 11

May 1968 in France

The degeneration of the Soviet Union into Stalinism spurred many on the Left to search for alternative ideologies to Stalinism and what they saw as its related tendencies (Leninism, Trotskyism). The acknowledgment from the highest levels of the Soviet bureaucracy that things had gone terribly awry – Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” – and the USSR’s repression of popular movements in Hungary and Czechoslovakia only intensified the soul-searching on the Left. At the same time, these seekers saw a turn back to a reformist socialism as a dead end for revolutionary politics.

Various groups re-discovered council communism in the post-World War II period. The French groups Socialism or Barbarism and the later Situationist International drew heavily from councilist ideas. The influence of the Situationists, a political/art/propaganda group was ubiquitous during the May 1968 events in France, in which student strikes escalated into a general wildcat strike that brought down the government... but fell short of revolution.

The readings for this week are: Cornelius Castoriadis’ *On the Content of Socialism, Part I*, Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle*, René Riesel’s *Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization* and Gilles Dauvé’s *Leninism and the Ultra-Left*.

Castoriadis and Debord were members of Socialism or Barbarism and Debord was a founding member of the Situationist International. Riesel was a Situationist member and Dauvé attempted to develop and expand upon the Situationist and councilist traditions.

The Eley chapters for this week are 20 and 21.

11.1 Cornelius Castoriadis, On the Content of Socialism, Part I (1955)

Introduction

...

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 defense of the

capitalist fatherland while neglecting even to make reference to a socialist system of rule. He sees the Stalinist 'communist' parties sometimes carrying out this same opportunistic policy of collaborating 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 effective action aimed at satisfying these demands impossible, and to substitute interminable discussions with the boss or the State for the strike. 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 violence, or frustrating them underhandedly, 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 1951-52, 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' or that they 'are betraying us.' But to the extent that they reflect on the situation, and discover for themselves that socialists and Stalinists behave the same way day after day, that they always and everywhere have 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 some 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 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 faithful and consistent servers 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. Indeed, Trotskyism has offered a permanent, step-by-step critique of socialist and Stalinist politics for the past quarter century, showing that the defeats of the workers' movement – Germany, 1923; China, 1925-27; England 1926; Germany, 1933; Austria, 1934; France, 1936; Spain, 1936-38; France and Italy, 1945-47; 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 Trotskyism 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 reforming of the socialists expresses the interests of a labor 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 reforming 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, 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 overcompensate 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' adventuress 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 reforming 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 defense in countries allied to the USSR, and adversaries of this kind of defense 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 inaugurated in these countries regimes that were in every respect similar to the Russian regime (taking into accounts of course, local conditions). It obviously was ridiculous to describe these regimes as degenerated workers' States.

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 labor 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 always can 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 always has been the basis for the domination of one class over society, in other words, at every instant the actual 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 executants. 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, non-personal 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-option the scale of society as a whole.

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 now will 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 that hereditary transmission is in no way an element necessary to establish the category. 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 work-place 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 of 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 program of the socialist revolution and the proletariat's objective no longer could 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 the Russian revolution, we established that on the economic level the Bolshevik party had as its program not workers' management but workers' control. This was because the Party, which did not think the revolution could immediately be a socialist revolutions 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 get 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 only lasted 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) 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 counts, 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, solely responsible to the central power, i.e., in the last analysis, to the Party. This was done in the in 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, no longer would 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. 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 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 program, 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.

The conclusions that follow from this brief analysis are clear: The program 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 inevitably will 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 program only insofar 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 to physically overthrow the exploiters who are in power (of this there is no doubt); it is rather the problem of how to positively 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 worker's 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 program 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.

Marxism and the Idea of the Proletariat's Autonomy

We must say right off that there is nothing essentially new about this conception. Its meaning is the same as Marx's celebrated formulation 'The emancipation of the workers must be conquered by the workers themselves.' It was expressed likewise by Trotsky: 'socialism, as opposed to capitalism, consciously builds itself up.' It would be only too easy to pile up quotations of this kind. What is new is the will and ability to take this idea in total seriousness while drawing out the theoretical as well as the practical implications. This could not be done till now, either by us or by the great founders of Marxism. For, on the one hand, the necessary historical experience was lacking; the preceding analysis shows the tremendous importance the degeneration of the Russian Revolution possesses for the clarification of the problem of workers' power. And on the other hand, and at a deeper level, revolutionary theory and practice in an exploiting society are subjected to a crucial contradiction that results from the fact that they belong to this society they are trying to abolish. This contradiction is expressed in an infinite number of ways.

Only one of these ways is of interest to us here. To be revolutionary signifies both to think that only the masses in struggle can resolve the problem of socialism and not to fold one's arms for all that; it means to think that the essential content of the revolution will be given by the masses' creative, original, and unforeseeable activity, and to act oneself, beginning with a rational analysis of the present with a perspective that anticipates the future. In the last analysis, it means to postulate that the revolution will signify an overthrow and a tremendous enlargement of our present form of rationality and to utilize this same rationality in order to anticipate the content of the revolution.

How this contradiction is relatively resolved and relatively pulsed anew at each stage of the workers' movement up to the ultimate victory of the revolution, cannot detain us here; this is the whole problem of the concrete dialectic of the historical development of the proletariat's revolutionary action and of revolutionary theory. At this time we need only establish that there is an intrinsic difficulty in developing a revolutionary theory and practice in an exploiting society, and that, insofar as he wants to overcome this difficulty, the theoretician, and, likewise indeed, the militant risks falling back unconsciously on the terrain of bourgeois thought, and more generally on the terrain of the type of thought that issues from an alienated society and that has dominated humanity for millennia.

...

Faced with a problem bequeathed by the bourgeois era one reasons like a bourgeois. One reasons like a bourgeois first of all in that one sets up an abstract and universal rule – this being the only form in which problems can be solved in an alienated society – forgetting that ‘law is like an ignorant and crude man’ who always repeats the same thing – and that a socialist solution can only be socialist if it is a concrete solution that involves the permanent participation of the organized units of workers in determining this solution. One also reasons like a bourgeois in that an alienated society is obliged to resort to abstract universal rules, because otherwise it could not be stable and because it is incapable of taking concrete cases into consideration on their own. It has neither the institutions nor the point of view necessary for this, whereas a socialist society, which creates precisely the organs that can take every concrete case into consideration, can have as its law only the perpetual determining activity of these organs. One is reasoning like the bourgeois in that one accepts the bourgeois idea (and here one is correctly reflecting the real situation in bourgeois society) that individual interest is the supreme motive of human activity. Thus, for the bourgeois mentality of English ‘neo-socialists,’ man in socialist society continues to be, before all else, an economic man, and society therefore ought to be regulated starting out from this idea. Thus transposing at once both the problems of capitalism and bourgeois behavior onto the new society, they are in essence preoccupied by the problem of incentives (earnings that stimulate the worker) and forget that already in capitalist society what makes the worker work are not incentives but the control of his work by other people and by the machines themselves. The idea of economic man has been created by bourgeois society in its image; to be quite exact, in the image of the bourgeois and certainly not in the image of the worker.

The workers act like ‘economic men’ only when they are obliged to do so, i.e., vis-à-vis the bourgeois (who thus makes money off of their piecework), but certainly not among themselves (as can be seen during strikes, and also in their attitudes toward their families; otherwise, workers would have ceased to exist a long time ago). That it may be said that they act in this way toward what “belongs” to them (family, class, etc) is fine, for we are saying precisely that they will act in this way toward everything when everything ‘belongs’ to them. And to claim that the family is visible and here whereas ‘everything’ is an abstraction again would be a misunderstanding for the everything we are talking about is concrete, it begins with the other workers in the shop, the factory, etc.

Workers’ Management of Production

A society without exploitation is conceivable, we have seen, if the management of production no longer is localized in a social category, in other words, if the structural division of society into directors and executants is abolished. Likewise we have seen that the solution to the problem thus posed can be given only by the proletariat itself. It is not only that no solution would be of any value, and simply could not even be carried out if it were not reinvented by the masses in an autonomous manner, nor is it that the problem posed exists on a scale that renders the active cooperation of millions of individuals indispensable to its solution. It is that by its very nature the solution to the problem of workers’ management cannot be fitted into a formula, or, as we have said already, it is that the only genuine law socialist society acknowledges is the perpetual determining activity of the masses’ organs of management. The reflections that follow, therefore, aim not at ‘resolving’ the problem of workers’ management theoretically – which once again would be a contradiction in terms – but rather at clarifying the givens of the problem. We aim only at dispelling misunderstandings

and widely held prejudices by showing how the problem of management is not posed and how it is posed.

If one thinks the basic task of the revolution is a negative task, the abolition of private property (which actually can be achieved by decree), one may think of the revolution as centered on the ‘taking of power’ and therefore as a moment (which may last a few days and, if need be, can be followed by a few months or years of civil war) when the workers seize power and expropriate de facto and de jure the factory owners. And in this case, one actually will be led to grant a prime importance to ‘the taking of power’ and to an organ constructed exclusively with this end in view.

...

[S]ocialist revolution... is not a simple negation of certain aspects of the order that preceded it; it is essentially positive. It has to construct its regime – constructing not factories but new relations of production for which the development of capitalism furnishes merely the presuppositions.

...

Now, it is obvious that these new relations of production cannot be merely those realized in the ‘socialization of the labor process,’ the cooperation of thousands of individuals within the great industrial units of production. For these are the relations of production typical of a highly developed form of capitalism. The ‘socialization of the labor process’ as it takes place in the capitalist economy is the premise of socialism in that it abolishes anarchy, isolation, dispersion, etc. But it is in no way socialism’s ‘prefiguration’ or ‘embryo,’ in that it is an antagonistic form of socialization; i.e., it reproduces and deepens the division between the mass of executants and a stratum of directors. At the same time the producers are subjected to a collective form of discipline, the conditions of production are standardized among various sectors and localities, and production tasks become interchangeable, we notice at the other pole not only a decreasing number of capitalists in a more and more parasitic role but also the constitution of a separate apparatus for directing production. Now, socialist relations of production are those types of relations that preclude the separate existence of a fixed and stable we stratum of directors production. We see, therefore, that the point of departure for realizing such relations can be only the destruction of the power of the bourgeoisie or the bureaucracy. The capitalist transformation of society ends with the bourgeois revolution; the socialist transformation of society begins with the proletarian revolution.

Modern developments themselves have abolished the aspects of the problem of management that once were considered decisive. On the one hand, managerial labor itself has become a form of wage labor, as Engels already pointed out; on the other hand, it has become itself a collective labor of execution. The ‘asks’ involved in the organization of labor, which formerly fell to the boss, assisted by a few technicians, now are performed by offices bringing together hundreds or thousands of persons, who themselves work as salaried, compartmentalized executants. The other group of traditional managerial tasks, which basically involve integrating the enterprise into the economy as a whole (in particular, those involving market ‘analysis’ or having a ‘flair’ for the market – which pertain to the nature, quality, and price of manufactured goods in demand, modifications in the scale of production, etc.), already has been transformed in its very nature with the advent of monopolies. The way this group of tasks is accomplished has been transformed too, since its basics are now carried out by a collective apparatus that canvasses the market, surveys consumer tastes, sells the product, etc. All this already has happened under monopoly capitalism. When private property gives way to State-run property, as in (total) bureaucratic capitalism, a central apparatus for coordinating the functioning of enterprises takes the place both of the market as ‘regulator’ and of the apparatuses belonging to each enterprise; this is the central planning bureaucracy, the economic ‘necessity’ for which should issue, according to its defenders, directly from these functions

of coordination.

...

The problem, therefore, appears only at the two extremes of economic activity: at the most specific level (how to translate the production goal of a particular factory into the production goals to be carried out by each group of workers in the shops of this factory) and at the universal level (how to determine the production goals for end-use goods of the entire economy). In both cases, the problem exists only because technique (in the broad sense of this term) develops – and it will develop even more in a socialist society. Indeed, it is clear that with an unchanging set of techniques the type of solution (if not the solutions themselves, whose exact terms will vary if, for example, there is accumulation) would be given once and for all, and that it would be merely a matter of allocating tasks within a shop (perfectly compatible with the possibility of interchangeable producers being able to switch between different jobs) or of determining the end-use products. The incessant modification of the different possible ways of carrying out production along with the incessant modification of final objectives will create the terrain on which collective management will work itself out.

Alienation in Capitalist Society

By alienation a characteristic moment of every class society, but one that appears to an incomparably greater extent and depth in capitalist society – we mean to say that the products of man's activity (whether we are talking about objects or institutions) take on an independent social existence opposite him.

Instead of being dominated by him, these products dominate him. Alienation is that which is opposed to man's free creativity in the world created by man; it is not an independent historical principle having its own source. It is the objectification of human activity insofar as it escapes its author without its author being able to escape it. Every form of alienation is a form of human objectification; i.e., it has its source in human activity (there are no 'secret forces' in history, any more than there is a cunning of reason in natural economic laws). But not every form of objectification is necessarily a form of alienation insofar as it can be consciously taken up again, reaffirmed or destroyed. As soon as it is posited, every product of human activity (even a purely internal attitude) 'escapes its author' and even leads an existence independent of that author. We cannot act as if we have not uttered some particular word, but we can cease to be determined by it. The past life of every individual is its objectification till today; but he is not necessarily and exhaustively alienated from it, his future is not permanently dominated by his past. Socialism will be the abolition of alienation in that it will permit the perpetuate conscious recovery without violent conflict of the socially givens in that it will restore people's domination over the products of their activity. Capitalist society is an alienated society in that its transformations take place independently of people's will and consciousness (including those of the dominant class), according to quasi-'laws' that express objective structures independent of their control.

What interests us here is not to describe how alienation is produced in the form of alienation in capitalist society (which would involve an analysis of the birth of capitalism as well as of its functioning) but to show the concrete manifestations of this alienation in various spheres of social activity as well as their intimate unity.

Only to the extent that we grasp the content of socialism as the proletariat's autonomy, as free creative activity determining itself, as workers' management in all domains, can we grasp the essence of man's alienation in capitalist society. Indeed, it is not by accident that 'Enlightened' members of

the bourgeoisie as well as reformist and Stalinist bureaucrats want to reduce the evils of capitalism to essentially economic evils, and, on the economic level, to exploitation in the form of an unequal distribution of national income. To the extent that their critique of capitalism is extended to other domains it again will take for its point of departure this unequal distribution of income, and it will consist basically of variations on the theme of the corrupting influence of money. If they look at the family or the sexual question, they will talk about how poverty makes prostitutes, about the young girl sold to the rich old man, about domestic problems that are the result of economic misery. If they look at culture, they will talk about venality, about obstacles put in the way of talented but underprivileged people, and about illiteracy. Certainly, all that is true, and important. But it only touches the surface of the problem, and those who talk only in this way regard man solely as a consumer and, by pretending to satisfy him on this levels they tend to reduce him to his (direct or sublimated) physical functions of digestion. But for man, what is at stake is not 'ingestion' pure and simple; rather it is a matter of self-expression and self-creation, and not only in the economic domain, but in all domains.

In class society, conflict is not expressed simply in the area of distribution, in the form of exploitation and limitations on consumption. This is only one aspect of the conflict and not the most important one. Its fundamental feature is to be found in the limitations placed on man's human role in the domain of production; eventually, these limitations go so far as an attempt to abolish this role completely. It is to be found in the fact that man is expropriated, both individually and collectively, from having command over his own activity. By his enslavement to the machine, and through the machine, to an abstract, foreign, and hostile will, man is deprived of the true content of his human activity, the conscious transformation of the natural world. It constantly inhibits his deep-seated tendency to realize himself in the object. The true signification of this situation is not only that the producers live it as an absolute misfortune, as a permanent mutilation; it is that this situation creates at the profoundest level of production a perpetual conflict, which explodes at least on occasion; it also is that it makes for huge wastefulness – in comparison to which the wastefulness involved in crises of overproduction is probably negligible – both through the producers' positive opposition to a system they reject and through the lost opportunities that result from neutralizing the inventiveness and creativity of millions of individuals. Beyond these features, we must ask ourselves to what extent the further development of capitalist production is possible, even 'technically,' if the direct producer continues to be kept in the compartmentalized state in which he currently resides.

But alienation in capitalist society is not simply economic. It not only manifests itself in connection with material life. It also affects in a fundamental way both man's sexual and his cultural functions. Indeed, society exists only insofar as there exists an organization of production and reproduction of the life of individuals and of the species – therefore an organization of economic and sexual relations – and only insofar as this organization ceases to be simply instinctual and becomes conscious – therefore only insofar as it includes the moment of culture.

As Marx said, 'A bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. Technique and consciousness obviously go hand in hand'. An instrument is a materialized and operative signification, or better yet a mediation between a deliberate intention and a still-ideal goal.

What is said in this quotation from Marx about the fabrication of bees' honeycombs can be said as well about their 'social' organization. As technique represents a rationalization of relations with the natural world, social organization represents a rationalization of the relations between

individuals of a group. Bee-hive organization is a non-conscious form of rationalization, but tribal organization is a conscious one; the primitive can describe it and he can deny it (by transgressing it). Rationalization in this context obviously does not mean 'our' rationalization. At one stage and in a given context, both magic and cannibalism represent rationalizations (without quotation marks).

If, therefore, a social organization is antagonistic, it will tend to be so both on the level of production and on the sexual and cultural planes as well. It is wrong to think that conflict in the domain of production 'creates' or 'determines' a secondary or derivative conflict on other planes; the structures of class domination impose themselves right away on all three levels at once and are impossible and inconceivable outside of this simultaneity, of this equivalence. Exploitation, for example, can be guaranteed only if the producers are expropriated from the management of production, but this expropriation both presupposes that the producers tend to be separated from the ability to manage – and therefore from culture – and reproduces this separation on an larger scale. Likewise, a society in which the fundamental inter-human relations are relations of domination presupposes and at the same time engenders an alienating organization of sexual relations, namely an organization that creates in individuals deep-seated inhibitions that tend to make them accept authority, etc.

Indeed, there obviously is a dialectical equivalence between social structures and the 'psychological' structures of individuals. From his first steps in life the individual is subjected to a constant set of pressures aimed at imposing on him a given attitude toward work, sex, ideas, at cheating him out of [frustrer] the natural objects of his activity and at inhibiting him by making him interiorize and value this process of frustration. Class society can exist only insofar as it succeeds to a large extent in enforcing this acceptance. This is why the conflict is not a purely external conflict, but is transposed into the hearts of individuals themselves. This antagonistic social structure corresponds to an antagonistic structure within individuals, each perpetually reproducing itself by means of the other. The point of these considerations is not only to emphasize the moment of identity in the essence of the relations of domination as they take place in the capitalist factory, in the patriarchal family, or in authoritarian teaching and 'aristocratic' culture. It is to point out that the socialist revolution necessarily will have to embrace all domains in their entirety, and this must be done not in some unforeseeable future and by increments, but rather from the outset, Certainly it has to begin in a certain fashion, which can be nothing other than the destruction of the power of the exploiters by the power of the armed masses and the installation of workers' management in production. But it will have to grapple immediately with the reconstruction of other social activities, under penalty of death. We will try to show this by looking at what kind of relations the proletariat, once in power, will entertain with culture.

The antagonistic structure of cultural relations in present-day society is expressed also (but in no way exclusively) by the radical division between manual and intellectual labor. The result is that the immense majority of humanity is totally separated from culture as activity and shares [participe] in only an infinitesimal fraction of the fruits of culture. On the other hand, the division of society into directors and executants becomes more and more homologous to the division between manual labor and intellectual labor (all management jobs being some form of intellectual labor and all manual jobs being some form of labor that consists of the execution of tasks). Workers' management is possible, therefore, only if from the outset it starts moving in the direction of overcoming this division, in particular with respect to intellectual labor as it relates to the production process. This implies in turn that the proletariat will begin to appropriate culture for itself. Certainly not as ready-made culture, as the assimilation of the 'results' of historically extant culture. Beyond a certain point, such an assimilation is both impossible in the immediate future and superfluous (as concerns what

is of interest to us here). Rather as appropriation of activity, as recovery of the cultural function itself and as a radical change in the producing masses' relation to intellectual work. Only as this change takes hold will workers' management become irreversible.

11.2 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967)

Chapter 4: The Proletariat as Subject and as Representation

The equal right of all to the goods and enjoyment of this world, the destruction of all authority, the negation of all moral restraints – these, at bottom, are the *raison d'être* of the March 18th insurrection and the charter of the fearsome organization that furnished it with an army. – Enquete parlementaire sur l'insurrection du 18 mars

...

74 By being thrown into history, by having to participate in the labor and struggles which make up history, men find themselves obliged to view their relations in a clear manner. This history has no object distinct from what takes place within it, even though the last unconscious metaphysical vision of the historical epoch could look at the productive progression through which history has unfolded as the very object of history. The subject of history can be none other than the living producing himself, becoming master and possessor of his world which is history, and existing as consciousness of his game.

75 The class struggles of the long revolutionary epoch inaugurated by the rise of the bourgeoisie, develop together with the thought of history, the dialectic, the thought which no longer stops to look for the meaning of what is, but rises to a knowledge of the dissolution of all that is, and in its movement dissolves all separation.

76 Hegel no longer had to interpret the world, but the transformation of the world. By only interpreting the transformation, Hegel is only the philosophical completion of philosophy. He wants to understand a world which makes itself. This historical thought is as yet only the consciousness which always arrives too late, and which pronounces the justification after the fact. Thus it has gone beyond separation only in thought. The paradox which consists of making the meaning of all reality depend on its historical completion, and at the same time of revealing this meaning as it makes itself the completion of history, flows from the simple fact that the thinker of the bourgeois revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries sought in his philosophy only a reconciliation with the results of these revolutions. Even as a philosophy of the bourgeois revolution, it does not express the entire process of this revolution, but only its final conclusion. In this sense, it is “not a philosophy of the revolution, but of the restoration” (Karl Korsch, *Theses on Hegel and Revolution*). ...

77 When the proletariat demonstrates by its own existence, through acts, that this thought of history is not forgotten, the exposure of the conclusion is at the same time the confirmation of the method.

78 The thought of history can be saved only by becoming practical thought; and the practice of the proletariat as a revolutionary class cannot be less than historical consciousness operating on the totality of its world. All the theoretical currents of the revolutionary workers' movement grew out of a critical confrontation with Hegelian thought – Stirner and Bakunin as well as Marx.

79 The inseparability of Marx's theory from the Hegelian method is itself inseparable from the revolutionary character of this theory, namely from its truth. This first relationship has been generally ignored, misunderstood, and even denounced as the weakness of what fallaciously became a marxist doctrine. Bernstein, in his *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation (Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie)*, perfectly reveals the connection between the dialectical method and historical partisanship, by deploring the unscientific forecasts of the 1847 *Manifesto* on the imminence of proletarian revolution in Germany: "This historical self-deception, so erroneous that any political visionary could hardly have improved on it, would be incomprehensible in a Marx, who at that time had already seriously studied economics, if we did not see in this the product of a relic of the antithetical Hegelian dialectic from which Marx, no less than Engels, could never completely free himself. In those times of general effervescence, this was all the more fatal to him."

80 The inversion carried out by Marx to "recover through transfer" the thought of the bourgeois revolutions does not trivially consist of putting the materialist development of productive forces in the place of the journey of the Hegelian Spirit moving towards its encounter with itself in time, its objectification being identical to its alienation, and its historical wounds leaving no scars. For once history becomes real, it no longer has an *end*. Marx ruined Hegel's position as separate from what happens, as well as contemplation by any supreme external agent whatever. From now on, theory has to know only what it does. As opposed to this, contemplation of the economy's movement within the dominant thought of the present society is the untranscended heritage of the undialectical part of Hegel's search for a circular system: it is an approval which has lost the dimension of the concept and which no longer needs a Hegelianism to justify itself, because the movement which it praises is no more than a sector without a world view, a sector whose mechanical development effectively dominates the whole. ...

81 What closely links Marx's theory with scientific thought is the rational understanding of the forces which really operate in society. But Marx's theory is fundamentally beyond scientific thought, and it preserves scientific thought only by superseding it: what is in question is an understanding of struggle, and not of law. ...

82 The bourgeois epoch, which wants to give a scientific foundation to history, overlooks the fact that this available science needed a historical foundation along with the economy. Inversely, history directly depends on economic knowledge only to the extent that it remains economic history. The extent to which the viewpoint of scientific observation could overlook the role of history in the economy (the global process which modifies its own basic scientific premises) is shown by the vanity of those socialist calculations which thought they had established the exact periodicity of crises. Now that the constant intervention of the State has succeeded in compensating for the effect of tendencies toward crisis, the same type of reasoning sees in this equilibrium a definitive economic harmony. The project of mastering the economy, the project of appropriating history, if it must know – and absorb – the science of society, cannot itself be scientific. The revolutionary viewpoint of a

movement which thinks it can dominate current history by means of scientific knowledge remains bourgeois.

...

84 The deterministic-scientific facet in Marx's thought was precisely the gap through which the process of "ideologization" penetrated, during his own lifetime, into the theoretical heritage left to the workers' movement. The arrival of the historical subject continues to be postponed, and it is economics, the historical science par excellence, which tends increasingly to guarantee the necessity of its own future negation. But what is pushed out of the field of theoretical vision in this manner is revolutionary practice, the only truth of this negation. What becomes important is to study economic development with patience, and to continue to accept suffering with a Hegelian tranquility, so that the result remains "a graveyard of good intentions." ... It is this mutilation, later accepted as definitive, which has constituted "marxism."

85 The weakness of Marx's theory is naturally the weakness of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of his time. The working class did not set off the permanent revolution in the Germany of 1848; the Commune was defeated in isolation. Revolutionary theory thus could not yet achieve its own total existence. The fact that Marx was reduced to defending and clarifying it with cloistered, scholarly work, in the British Museum, caused a loss in the theory itself. The scientific justifications Marx elaborated about the future development of the working class and the organizational practice that went with them became obstacles to proletarian consciousness at a later stage.

...

89 If Marx, in a given period of his participation in the struggle of the proletariat, expected too much from scientific forecasting, to the point of creating the intellectual foundation for the illusions of economism, it is known that he did not personally succumb to those illusions. In a well-known letter of December 7, 1867, accompanying an article where he himself criticized *Capital*, an article which Engels would later present to the press as the work of an adversary, Marx clearly disclosed the limits of his own science: "... The subjective tendency of the author (which was perhaps imposed on him by his political position and his past), namely the manner in which he views and presents to others the ultimate results of the real movement, the real social process, has no relation to his own actual analysis." Thus Marx, by denouncing the "tendentious conclusions" of his own objective analysis, and by the irony of the "perhaps" with reference to the extra-scientific choices imposed on him, at the same time shows the methodological key to the fusion of the two aspects.

90 The fusion of knowledge and action must be realized in the historical struggle itself, in such a way that each of these terms guarantees the truth of the other. The formation of the proletarian class into a subject means the organization of revolutionary struggles and the organization of society at the revolutionary moment: it is then that the practical conditions of consciousness must exist, conditions in which the theory of praxis is confirmed by becoming practical theory. However, this central question of organization was the question least developed by revolutionary theory at the time when the workers' movement was founded, namely when this theory still had the unitary character which came from the thought of history. (Theory had undertaken precisely this task in order to develop a unitary historical practice.) This question is in fact the locus of inconsistency of this theory, allowing the return of statist and hierarchic methods of application borrowed from the bourgeois revolution. The forms of organization of the workers' movement which were developed

on the basis of this renunciation of theory have in turn prevented the maintenance of a unitary theory, breaking it up into varied specialized and partial disciplines. Due to the betrayal of unitary historical thought, this ideological estrangement from theory can no longer recognize the practical verification of this thought when such verification emerges in spontaneous struggles of workers; all it can do is repress every manifestation and memory of such verification. Yet these historical forms which appeared in struggle are precisely the practical milieu which the theory needed in order to be true. They are requirements of the theory which have not been formulated theoretically. The soviet was not a theoretical discovery; yet its existence in practice was already the highest theoretical truth of the International Workingmen's Association.

91 The first successes of the struggle of the International led it to free itself from the confused influences of the dominant ideology which survived in it. But the defeat and repression which it soon encountered brought to the foreground a conflict between two conceptions of the proletarian revolution. Both of these conceptions contain an authoritarian dimension and thus abandon the conscious self-emancipation of the working class. In effect, the quarrel between Marxists and Bakuninists (which became irreconcilable) was two-edged, referring at once to power in the revolutionary society and to the organization of the present movement, and when the positions of the adversaries passed from one aspect to the other, they reversed themselves. Bakunin fought the illusion of abolishing classes by the authoritarian use of state power, foreseeing the reconstitution of a dominant bureaucratic class and the dictatorship of the most knowledgeable, or those who would be reputed to be such. Marx thought that the growth of economic contradictions inseparable from democratic education of the workers would reduce the role of the proletarian State to a simple phase of legalizing the new social relations imposing themselves objectively, and denounced Bakunin and his followers for the authoritarianism of a conspiratorial elite which deliberately placed itself above the International and formulated the extravagant design of imposing on society the irresponsible dictatorship of those who are most revolutionary, or those who would designate themselves to be such. Bakunin, in fact, recruited followers on the basis of such a perspective: "Invisible pilots in the center of the popular storm, we must direct it, not with a visible power, but with the collective dictatorship of all the allies. A dictatorship without badge, without title, without official right, yet all the more powerful because it will have none of the appearances of power." Thus two ideologies of the workers' revolution opposed each other, each containing a partially true critique, but losing the unity of the thought of history, and instituting themselves into ideological authorities. Powerful organizations, like German Social-Democracy and the Iberian Anarchist Federation faithfully served one or the other of these ideologies; and everywhere the result was very different from what had been desired.

92 The strength and the weakness of the real anarchist struggle resides in its viewing the goal of proletarian revolution as immediately present (the pretensions of anarchism in its individualist variants have always been laughable). From the historical thought of modern class struggles collectivist anarchism retains only the conclusion, and its exclusive insistence on this conclusion is accompanied by deliberate contempt for method. Thus its critique of the political struggle has remained abstract, while its choice of economic struggle is affirmed only as a function of the illusion of a definitive solution brought about by one single blow on this terrain – on the day of the general strike or the insurrection. The anarchists have an ideal to realize. Anarchism remains a merely ideological negation of the State and of classes, namely of the social conditions of separate ideology. It is the ideology of pure liberty which equalizes everything and dismisses the very idea

of historical evil. This viewpoint which fuses all partial desires has given anarchism the merit of representing the rejection of existing conditions in favor of the whole of life, and not of a privileged critical specialization; but this fusion is considered in the absolute, according to individual caprice, before its actual realization, thus condemning anarchism to an incoherence too easily seen through. Anarchism has merely to repeat and to replay the same simple, total conclusion in every single struggle, because this first conclusion was from the beginning identified with the entire outcome of the movement. Thus Bakunin could write in 1873, when he left the Federation Jurassienne: "During the past nine years, more ideas have been developed within the International than would be needed to save the world, if ideas alone could save it, and I challenge anyone to invent a new one. It is no longer the time for ideas, but for facts and acts." There is no doubt that this conception retains an element of the historical thought of the proletariat, the certainty that ideas must become practice, but it leaves the historical terrain by assuming that the adequate forms for this passage to practice have already been found and will never change.

93 The anarchists, who distinguish themselves explicitly from the rest of the workers' movement by their ideological conviction, reproduce this separation of competences among themselves; they provide a terrain favorable to informal domination over all anarchist organizations by propagandists and defenders of their ideology, specialists who are in general more mediocre the more their intellectual activity consists of the repetition of certain definitive truths. Ideological respect for unanimity of decision has on the whole been favorable to the uncontrolled authority, within the organization itself, of specialists in freedom; and revolutionary anarchism expects the same type of unanimity from the liberated population, obtained by the same means. Furthermore, the refusal to take into account the opposition between the conditions of a minority grouped in the present struggle and of a society of free individuals, has nourished a permanent separation among anarchists at the moment of common decision, as is shown by an infinity of anarchist insurrections in Spain, confined and destroyed on a local level.

94 The illusion entertained more or less explicitly by genuine anarchism is the permanent imminence of an instantaneously accomplished revolution which will prove the truth of the ideology and of the mode of practical organization derived from the ideology. In 1936, anarchism in fact led a social revolution, the most advanced model of proletarian power in all time. In this context it should be noted that the signal for a general insurrection had been imposed by a pronunciamiento of the army. Furthermore, to the extent that this revolution was not completed during the first days (because of the existence of Franco's power in half the country, strongly supported from abroad while the rest of the international proletarian movement was already defeated, and because of remains of bourgeois forces or other statist workers' parties within the camp of the Republic) the organized anarchist movement showed itself unable to extend the demi-victories of the revolution, or even to defend them. Its known leaders became ministers and hostages of the bourgeois State which destroyed the revolution only to lose the civil war.

95 The "orthodox Marxism" of the Second International is the scientific ideology of the socialist revolution: it identifies its whole truth with objective processes in the economy and with the progress of a recognition of this necessity by the working class educated by the organization. This ideology rediscovers the confidence in pedagogical demonstration which had characterized utopian socialism, but mixes it with a contemplative reference to the course of history: this attitude has lost as much of the Hegelian dimension of a total history as it has lost the immobile image of totality in the utopian

critique (most highly developed by Fourier). This scientific attitude can do no more than revive a symmetry of ethical choices; it is from this attitude that the nonsense of Hilferding springs when he states that recognizing the necessity of socialism gives “no indication of the practical attitude to be adopted. For it is one thing to recognize a necessity, and it is quite another thing to put oneself at the service of this necessity” (*Finanzkapital*). Those who failed to recognize that for Marx and for the revolutionary proletariat the unitary thought of history was in no way distinct from the practical attitude to be adopted, regularly became victims of the practice they adopted.

96 The ideology of the social-democratic organization gave power to professors who educated the working class, and the form of organization which was adopted was the form most suitable for this passive apprenticeship. The participation of socialists of the Second International in political and economic struggles was admittedly concrete but profoundly uncritical. It was conducted in the name of revolutionary illusion by means of an obviously reformist practice. The revolutionary ideology was to be shattered by the very success of those who held it. The separate position of the movement’s deputies and journalists attracted the already recruited bourgeois intellectuals toward a bourgeois mode of life. Even those who had been recruited from the struggles of industrial workers and who were themselves workers, were transformed by the union bureaucracy into brokers of labor power who sold labor as a commodity, for a just price. If their activity was to retain some appearance of being revolutionary, capitalism would have had to be conveniently unable to support economically this reformism which it tolerated politically (in the legalistic agitation of the social-democrats). But such an antagonism, guaranteed by their science, was constantly belied by history.

97 Bernstein, the social-democrat furthest from political ideology and most openly attached to the methodology of bourgeois science, had the honesty to want to demonstrate the reality of this contradiction; the English workers’ reformist movement had also demonstrated it, by doing without revolutionary ideology. But the contradiction was definitively demonstrated only by historical development itself. Although full of illusions in other respects, Bernstein had denied that a crisis of capitalist production would miraculously force the hand of socialists who wanted to inherit the revolution only by this legitimate rite. The profound social upheaval which arose with the first world war, though fertile with the awakening of consciousness, twice demonstrated that the social-democratic hierarchy had not educated revolutionarily; and had in no way transformed the German workers into theoreticians: first when the vast majority of the party rallied to the imperialist war; next when, in defeat, it squashed the Spartakist revolutionaries. The ex-worker Ebert still believed in sin, since he admitted that he hated revolution “like sin.” The same leader showed himself a precursor of the socialist representation which soon after confronted the Russian proletariat as its absolute enemy; he even formulated exactly the same program for this new alienation: “Socialism means working a lot”.

98 Lenin, as a Marxist thinker, was no more than a consistent and faithful Kautskyist who applied the revolutionary ideology of “orthodox Marxism” to Russian conditions, conditions unfavorable to the reformist practice carried on elsewhere by the Second International. In the Russian context, the external management of the proletariat, acting by means of a disciplined clandestine party subordinated to intellectuals transformed into “professional revolutionaries,” becomes a profession which refuses to deal with the ruling professions of capitalist society (the Czarist political regime being in any case unable to offer such opportunities which are based on an advanced stage of bourgeois power). It therefore became the profession of the absolute management of society.

99 With the war and the collapse of the social-democratic international in the face of the war, the authoritarian ideological radicalism of the Bolsheviks spread all over the world. The bloody end of the democratic illusions of the workers' movement transformed the entire world into a Russia, and Bolshevism, reigning over the first revolutionary breach brought on by this epoch of crisis, offered to proletarians of all lands its hierarchic and ideological model, so that they could "speak Russian" to the ruling class. Lenin did not reproach the Marxism of the Second International for being a revolutionary ideology, but for ceasing to be one.

100 The historical moment when Bolshevism triumphed for itself in Russia and when social-democracy fought victoriously for the old world marks the inauguration of the state of affairs which is at the heart of the domination of the modern spectacle: the representation of the working class radically opposes itself to the working class.

101 "In all previous revolutions," wrote Rosa Luxemburg in *Rote Fahne* of December 21, 1918, "the combatants faced each other directly: class against class, program against program. In the present revolution, the troops protecting the old order do not intervene under the insignia of the ruling class, but under the flag of a 'social-democratic party.' If the central question of revolution had been posed openly and honestly: capitalism or socialism? the great mass of the proletariat would today have no doubts or hesitations." Thus, a few days before its destruction, the radical current of the German proletariat discovered the secret of the new conditions which had been created by the preceding process (toward which the representation of the working class had greatly contributed): the spectacular organization of defense of the existing order, the social reign of appearances where no "central question" can any longer be posed "openly and honestly." The revolutionary representation of the proletariat had at this stage become both the main factor and the central result of the general falsification of society.

102 The organization of the proletariat on the Bolshevik model which emerged from Russian backwardness and from the abandonment of revolutionary struggle by the workers' movement of advanced countries, found in this backwardness all the conditions which carried this form of organization toward the counter-revolutionary inversion which it unconsciously contained at its source. The continuing retreat of the mass of the European workers' movement in the face of the *Hic Rhodus, hic salta* of the 1918-1920 period, a retreat which included the violent destruction of its radical minority, favored the completion of the Bolshevik development and let this fraudulent outcome present itself to the world as the only proletarian solution. ...

...

105 Revolutionary ideology, the coherence of the separate, of which Leninism represents the greatest voluntaristic attempt, supervising a reality which rejects it, with Stalinism returns to its truth in incoherence. At that point ideology is no longer a weapon, but a goal. The lie which is no longer challenged becomes lunacy. Reality as well as the goal dissolve in the totalitarian ideological proclamation: all it says is all there is. This is a local primitivism of the spectacle, whose role is nevertheless essential in the development of the world spectacle. The ideology which is materialized in this context has not economically transformed the world, as has capitalism which reached the stage of abundance; it has merely transformed perception by means of the police.

...

114 In this complex and terrible development which has carried the epoch of class struggles toward new conditions, the proletariat of the industrial countries has completely lost the affirmation of its autonomous perspective and also, in the last analysis, its illusions, but not its being. It has not been suppressed. It remains irreducibly in existence within the intensified alienation of modern capitalism: it is the immense majority of workers who have lost all power over the use of their lives and who, once they know this, redefine themselves as the proletariat, as negation at work within this society. The proletariat is objectively reinforced by the progressive disappearance of the peasantry and by the extension of the logic of factory labor to a large sector of “services” and intellectual professions. Subjectively the proletariat is still far removed from its practical class consciousness, not only among white collar workers but also among wage workers who have as yet discovered only the impotence and mystification of the old politics. Nevertheless, when the proletariat discovers that its own externalized power collaborates in the constant reinforcement of capitalist society, not only in the form of its labor but also in the form of unions, of parties, or of the state power it had built to emancipate itself, it also discovers from concrete historical experience that it is the class totally opposed to all congealed externalization and all specialization of power. It carries the revolution which cannot let anything remain outside of itself, the demand for the permanent domination of the present over the past, and the total critique of separation. It is this that must find its suitable form in action. No quantitative amelioration of its misery, no illusion of hierarchic integration is a lasting cure for its dissatisfaction, because the proletariat cannot truly recognize itself in a particular wrong it suffered nor in the righting of a particular wrong. It cannot recognize itself in the righting of a large number of wrongs either, but only in the absolute wrong of being relegated to the margin of life.

115 The new signs of negation multiplying in the economically developed countries, signs which are misunderstood and falsified by spectacular arrangement, already enable us to draw the conclusion that a new epoch has begun: now, after the workers’ first attempt at subversion, it is capitalist abundance which has failed. When anti-union struggles of Western workers are repressed first of all by unions, and when the first amorphous protests launched by rebellious currents of youth directly imply the rejection of the old specialized politics, of art and of daily life, we see two sides of a new spontaneous struggle which begins under a criminal guise. These are the portents of a second proletarian assault against class society. When the last children of this still immobile army reappear on this battleground which was altered and yet remains the same, they follow a new “General Ludd” who, this time, urges them to destroy the machines of permitted consumption.

116 “The political form at last discovered in which the economic emancipation of labor could be realized” has in this century acquired a clear outline in the revolutionary workers’ Councils which concentrate in themselves all the functions of decision and execution, and federate with each other by means of delegates responsible to the base and revocable at any moment. Their actual existence has as yet been no more than a brief sketch, quickly opposed and defeated by various defensive forces of class society, among which their own false consciousness must often be included. Pannekoek rightly insisted that choosing the power of workers’ Councils “poses problems” rather than providing a solution. Yet it is precisely in this power where the problems of the proletarian revolution can find their real solution. This is where the objective conditions of historical consciousness are reunited. This is where direct active communication is realized, where specialization, hierarchy and separation end, where the existing conditions have been transformed “into conditions of unity.” Here the proletarian subject can emerge from his struggle against contemplation: his consciousness is equal

to the practical organization which it undertakes because this consciousness is itself inseparable from coherent intervention in history.

117 In the power of the Councils, which must internationally supplant all other power, the proletarian movement is its own product and this product is the producer himself. He is to himself his own goal. Only there is the spectacular negation of life negated in its turn.

118 The appearance of the Councils was the highest reality of the proletarian movement in the first quarter of this century, a reality which was not seen or was travestied because it disappeared along with the rest of the movement that was negated and eliminated by the entire historical experience of the time. At the new moment of proletarian critique, this result returns as the only undefeated point of the defeated movement. Historical consciousness, which knows that this is the only milieu where it can exist, can now recognize this reality, no longer at the periphery of what is ebbing, but at the center of what is rising.

119 A revolutionary organization existing before the power of the Councils (it will find its own form through struggle), for all these historical reasons, already knows that it does not represent the working class. It must recognize itself as no more than a radical separation from the world of separation.

120 The revolutionary organization is the coherent expression of the theory of praxis entering into non-unilateral communication with practical struggles, in the process of becoming practical theory. Its own practice is the generalization of communication and of coherence in these struggles. At the revolutionary moment of dissolution of social separation, this organization must recognize its own dissolution as a separate organization.

121 The revolutionary organization can be nothing less than a unitary critique of society, namely a critique which does not compromise with any form of separate power anywhere in the world, and a critique proclaimed globally against all the aspects of alienated social life. In the struggle between the revolutionary organization and class society, the weapons are nothing other than the essence of the combatants themselves: the revolutionary organization cannot reproduce within itself the dominant society's conditions of separation and hierarchy. It must struggle constantly against its deformation in the ruling spectacle. The only limit to participation in the total democracy of the revolutionary organization is the recognition and self-appropriation of the coherence of its critique by all its members, a coherence which must be proved in the critical theory as such and in the relation between the theory and practical activity.

122 When constantly growing capitalist alienation at all levels makes it increasingly difficult for workers to recognize and name their own misery, forcing them to face the alternative of rejecting the totality of their misery or nothing, the revolutionary organization has to learn that it can no longer combat alienation with alienated forms.

123 Proletarian revolution depends entirely on the condition that, for the first time, theory as intelligence of human practice be recognized and lived by the masses. It requires workers to become dialecticians and to inscribe their thought into practice. Thus it demands of men without quality

more than the bourgeois revolution demanded of the qualified men which it delegated to carry out its tasks (since the partial ideological consciousness constructed by a part of the bourgeois class was based on the economy, this central part of social life in which this class was already in power). The very development of class society to the stage of spectacular organization of non-life thus leads the revolutionary project to become visibly what it already was essentially.

124 Revolutionary theory is now the enemy of all revolutionary ideology and knows it.

11.3 René, Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization (1969)

“The Workers and Peasants Government has decreed that Kronstadt and the rebelling ships must immediately submit to the authority of the Soviet Republic. I therefore order all who have revolted against the socialist fatherland to lay down their arms at once. Recalcitrants should be disarmed and turned over to the Soviet authorities. The commissars and other members of the government who have been arrested must be liberated at once. Only those who surrender unconditionally can expect mercy from the Soviet Republic. I am simultaneously giving orders to prepare for the suppression of the rebellion and the subjugation of the sailors by armed force. All responsibility for the harm that may be suffered by the peaceful population will rest entirely on the heads of the White Guard mutineers. This warning is final.” – Trotsky, Kamenev, *Ultimatum to Kronstadt*

“We have only one answer to all that: All power to the soviets! Take your hands off them – your hands that are red with the blood of the martyrs of freedom who fought the White Guards, the landowners and the bourgeoisie!” – *Kronstadt Izvestia* #6

During the fifty years since the Leninists reduced communism to electrification, since the Bolshevik counterrevolution erected the *Soviet State* over the dead body of the power of the soviets, and since “soviet” ceased to mean *council*, revolutions have continued to fling the Kronstadt demand in the face of the rulers of the Kremlin: “*All power to the soviets and not to the parties.*” The remarkable persistence of the *real tendency* toward *workers councils* throughout this half-century of efforts and repeated suppressions of the modern proletarian movement now imposes the councils on the new revolutionary current as the sole form of antistate dictatorship of the proletariat, as the sole tribunal that will be able to pass judgment on the old world and carry out the sentence itself.

The essence of the councils must be more precisely delineated, not only by refuting the gross falsifications propagated by social democracy, the Russian bureaucracy, Titoism and even Ben-Bellaism, but above all by recognizing the insufficiencies in the fledgling practical experiences of the power of the councils that have briefly appeared so far; as well, of course, as the insufficiencies in councilist revolutionaries’ very conceptions. The council’s *ultimate tendency* appears negatively in the limits and illusions which have marked its first manifestations and which have caused its defeat quite as much as has the immediate and uncompromising struggle that is naturally waged against it by the ruling class. The purpose of the council form is the *practical unification* of proletarians in the process of appropriating the material and intellectual means of changing all existing conditions and making themselves the masters of their own history. It can and must be the organization in acts of historical consciousness. But in fact it has nowhere yet succeeded in overcoming the separation

embodied in *specialized* political organizations and in the forms of ideological false consciousness that they produce and defend. Moreover, although it is quite natural that the councils that have been major agents of revolutionary situations have generally been *councils of delegates*, since it is such councils which coordinate and federate the decisions of local councils, it nevertheless appears that the general assemblies of the rank and file have almost always been considered as mere assemblies of electors, so that the first level of the “council” is situated above them. Here already lies an element of separation, which can only be surmounted by treating local general assemblies of all the proletarians in revolution as the *ultimate, fundamental councils*, from which any delegation must derive its power.

...

Consciousness of what the power of the councils is and *must be* arises from the very practice of that power. But at an *impeded* stage of that power it may be very different from what one or another isolated member of a council, or even an entire council, thinks. *Ideology* opposes the truth in acts whose field is the system of the councils; and such ideology manifests itself not only in the form of hostile ideologies, or in the form of ideologies *about the councils* devised by political forces that want to subjugate them, but also in the form of an ideology *in favor of* the power of the councils that restrains and reifies their total theory and practice. A pure *councilism* will inevitably prove to be an enemy of the reality of the councils. There is a risk that such an ideology, more or less consistently formulated, will be borne by revolutionary organizations that are in principle in favor of the power of the councils. This power, which is itself *the organization of revolutionary society* and whose coherence is objectively determined by the practical necessities of this historical task grasped as a whole, can in no case escape the practical problem posed by *specialist organizations* which, whether enemies of the councils or more or less genuinely in favor of them, will inevitably interfere in their functioning. The masses organized in councils must be aware of this problem and overcome it. This is where councilist theory and the existence of authentically councilist organizations have a great importance. In them already appear certain essential points that will be at stake in the councils and in their own interaction with the councils.

All revolutionary history shows the part played in the failure of the councils by the emergence of a councilist ideology. The ease with which the spontaneous organization of the proletariat in struggle wins its first victories is often the prelude to a second phase in which counterrevolution works from the inside, in which the movement lets go of its reality in order to pursue the illusion that amounts to its defeat. Councilism is the artificial respiration that revives the old world.

...

Leaving aside the social-democratic or Bolshevik ideologies *about* the councils, which from Berlin to Kronstadt always had a Noske or a Trotsky too many, councilist ideology itself, as manifested in past *councilist organizations* and in some present ones, has always had several general assemblies and imperative mandates too few. All the councils that have existed until now, with the exception of the *agrarian* collectives of Aragon, *saw themselves* as simply “democratically elected councils,” even when the highest moments of their practice, when all decisions were made by sovereign general assemblies mandating revocable delegates, contradicted this limitation.

Only historical practice, through which the working class must discover and realize all its possibilities, will indicate the precise organizational forms of council power. On the other hand, it is the immediate task of revolutionaries to determine the fundamental principles of the *councilist organizations* that are going to arise in every country. By formulating some hypotheses and recalling the fundamental requirements of the revolutionary movement, this article – which should be followed by others – is intended to initiate a *genuine and egalitarian* debate. The only people

who will be excluded from this debate are those who refuse to pose the problem in these terms, those who in the name of some sub-anarchist spontaneism proclaim their opposition to any form of organization, and who only reproduce the defects and confusion of the old movement – mystics of nonorganization, workers discouraged by having been mixed up with Trotskyist sects too long, students imprisoned in their impoverishment who are incapable of escaping from Bolshevik-type organizational schemas. The situationists are obviously partisans of organization – the existence of the *situationist organization* testifies to that. Those who announce their agreement with our theses while crediting the SI with a vague spontaneism simply don't know how to read.

Organization is indispensable precisely because it isn't everything and doesn't enable everything to be saved or won. Contrary to what butcher Noske said (in *Von Kiel bis Kapp*) about the events of 6 January 1919, the masses did not fail to become "masters of Berlin on noon that day" because they had "fine talkers" instead of "determined leaders," but because the factory councils' form of autonomous organization had not yet attained a sufficient level of autonomy for them to be able to do without "determined leaders" and separate organizations to handle their linkups. The shameful example of Barcelona in May 1937 is another proof of this: the fact that arms were brought out so quickly in response to the Stalinist provocation says a lot for the Catalonian masses' immense capacities for autonomy; but the fact that the order to *surrender* issued by the anarchist ministers was so quickly obeyed demonstrates how much autonomy for victory they still *lacked*. Tomorrow again it will be the workers' degree of autonomy that will decide our fate.

The councilist organizations that will be formed will therefore not fail to recognize and appropriate, as indeed a minimum, the Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations adopted by the 7th Conference of the SI (see *Internationale Situationniste* #11). Since their task will be to work toward the power of the councils, which is incompatible with any other form of power, they will be aware that a merely *abstract* agreement with this definition condemns them to nonexistence; this is why their real agreement will be practically demonstrated in the nonhierarchical relations within their groups or sections; in the relations between these groups and with other autonomous groups or organizations; in the development of revolutionary theory and an integral critique of the ruling society; and in the ongoing critique of their own practice. Maintaining a unitary program and practice, they will refuse the old partitioning of the workers movement into separate organizations (i.e. parties and unions). Despite the beautiful history of the councils, all the councilist organizations of the past that have played a significant role in class struggles have accepted separation into political, economic and social sectors. One of the few old parties worth analysis, the *Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands* (KAPD, German Communist Workers Party), adopted a councilist program, but by assigning to itself as its only essential tasks propaganda and theoretical discussion – "the political education of the masses" – it left the role of federating the revolutionary factory organizations to the *Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands* (AAUD, General Workers Union of Germany), a schema not far from traditional syndicalism. Even though the KAPD rejected the Leninist idea of the mass party, along with the parliamentarianism and syndicalism of the KPD (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* – German Communist Party), and preferred to group together politically conscious workers, it nevertheless remained tied to the old hierarchical model of the vanguard party: professionals of Revolution and salaried propagandists. A rejection of this model (in particular, a rejection of the practice of separating the political organization from the revolutionary factory organizations) led in 1920 to the secession of some of the AAUD members, who then formed the AAUD-E (the "E" for *Einheitsorganisation* – Unified Organization). By the very working of its internal democracy the new unitary organization aimed to accomplish the educative work that had until then devolved on the KAPD, and it simultaneously assigned itself the task

of coordinating struggles: the factory organizations that it federated were supposed to transform themselves into councils at the revolutionary moment and take over the management of the society. Here again the modern watchword of workers councils was still mixed with messianic memories of the old revolutionary syndicalism: the factory organizations would magically become councils when all the workers took part in them.

All that led where it would. After the crushing of the 1921 insurrection and the repression of the movement, large numbers of workers, discouraged by the waning prospect of revolution, abandoned factory struggle. The AAUD was only another name for the KAPD, and the AAUD-E saw revolution recede as fast as its membership declined. They were no longer anything but bearers of a *councilist ideology* more and more cut off from reality.

...

Some present-day organizations cunningly pretend not to exist. This enables them to avoid both-ering with the slightest clarification of the bases on which they assemble any assortment of people (while magically labeling them all “workers”); to avoid giving their semi-members any account of the *informal leadership* that holds the controls; and to thoughtlessly denounce any theoretical expression and any other form of organization as automatically evil and harmful. Thus the *Informations, Correspondance Ouvrières* group writes in a recent bulletin (*ICO* #84, August 1969): “Councils are the transformation of strike committees under the influence of the situation itself and in response to the very necessities of the struggle, within the very dialectic of that struggle. Any other attempt, at any moment in a struggle, to declare the necessity of creating workers councils reveals a councilist ideology such as can be seen in diverse forms in certain unions, in the PSU, or among the situationists. The very concept of council excludes any ideology.” These individuals clearly know nothing about ideology – their own ideology is distinguished from more fully developed ones only by its spineless eclecticism. But they have heard (perhaps from Marx, perhaps only from the SI) that ideology has become a bad thing. They take advantage of this to try to have it believed that any theoretical work – which they avoid as if it were a sin – is an ideology, among the situationists exactly as in the PSU. But their gallant recourse to the “dialectic” and the “concept” which they have now added to their vocabulary in no way saves them from an imbecilic ideology of which the above quotation alone is evidence enough. If one idealistically relies on the council “concept” or, what is even more euphoric, on the practical inactivity of *ICO*, to “exclude all ideology” in the real councils, one must expect the worst – we have seen that historical experience justifies no such optimism in this regard. The supersession of the primitive council form can only come from struggles becoming more conscious, and from struggles for *more consciousness*. *ICO*’s mechanistic image of the strike committee’s perfect automatic response to “necessities,” which presents the council as automatically coming into existence at the appropriate time *provided that one makes sure not to talk about it*, completely ignores the experience of the revolutions of our century, which shows that “the situation itself” is just as ready to crush the councils, or to enable them to be manipulated and coopted, as it is to give rise to them.

Let us leave this contemplative ideology, this pathetic caricature of the natural sciences which would have us observe the emergence of a proletarian revolution almost as if it were a solar eruption. Councilist organizations will be formed, though they must be quite the contrary of general staffs that would cause the councils to rise up on order. In spite of the new period of open social crisis we have entered since the occupations movement, and the proliferation of encouraging situations here and there, from Italy to the USSR, it is quite likely that genuine councilist organizations will still take a long time to form and that other important revolutionary situations will occur before such organizations are in a position to intervene in them at a significant level. One must not play with

councilist organization by setting up or supporting premature parodies of it. But the councils will certainly have greater chances of maintaining themselves as sole power if they contain conscious councilists and if there is a real appropriation of councilist theory.

In contrast to the council as permanent *basic unit* (ceaselessly setting up and modifying councils of delegates emanating from itself), as the assembly in which all the workers of an enterprise (workshop and factory councils) and all the inhabitants of an urban district who have rallied to the revolution (street councils, neighborhood councils) must participate, a councilist organization, in order to guarantee its coherence and the authentic working of its internal democracy, must *choose its members* in accordance with what they explicitly want and what they actually can do. As for the councils, their coherence is guaranteed by the single fact that they are *the sole power*; that they eliminate all other power and decide everything. This practical experience is the terrain where people learn how to become conscious of their own action, where they “realize philosophy.” It goes without saying that their majorities also run the risk of making lots of momentary mistakes and not having the time or the means to rectify them. But they know that their fate is the product of their own decisions, and that they will be destroyed by the repercussions of any mistakes they don’t correct.

Within councilist organizations real equality of everyone in making decisions and carrying them out will not be an empty slogan or an abstract demand. Of course, not all the members of an organization will have the same talents (it is obvious, for example, that a worker will invariably write better than a student). But because in its aggregate the organization will have all the talents it needs, no hierarchy of individual talents will come to undermine its democracy. It is neither membership in a councilist organization nor the proclamation of an ideal equality that will enable all its members to be beautiful and intelligent and to live well; but only their real aptitudes for becoming more beautiful and more intelligent and for living better, freely developing in the only game that’s worth the pleasure: the destruction of the old world.

In the social movements that are going to spread, the councilists will refuse to let themselves be elected to strike committees. On the contrary, their task will be to act in such a way as to encourage the rank-and-file self-organization of the workers into general assemblies that decide how the struggle is carried out. It will be necessary to begin to understand that the absurd call for a “central strike committee” proposed by some naïve individuals during the May 1968 occupations movement would, had it succeeded, have sabotaged the movement toward the autonomy of the masses even more quickly than actually happened, since almost all the strike committees were controlled by the Stalinists.

Given that it is not for us to forge a plan for all time, and that one step forward by the real movement of the councils will be worth more than a dozen councilist programs, it is difficult to state precise hypotheses regarding the relation of councilist organizations with councils during a revolutionary situation. A councilist organization – which knows itself to be *separated* from the proletariat – must cease to exist as a separate organization in the moment that abolishes separations; and it will have to do this even if the complete freedom of association guaranteed by the power of the councils allows various parties and organizations that are enemies of this power to survive. It may be doubted, however, that it is feasible to immediately dissolve all councilist organizations the very instant the councils first appear, as Pannekoek wished. The councilists should speak as councilists within the council, rather than staging an exemplary dissolution of their organizations only to regroup them on the side and play pressure-group politics in the general assembly. In this way it will be easier and more legitimate for them to combat and denounce the inevitable presence of bureaucrats, spies and ex-scabs who will infiltrate here and there. They will also have to struggle

against fake councils or fundamentally reactionary ones (e.g. police councils) which will not fail to appear. They will act in such a way that the unified power of the councils does not recognize such bodies or their delegates. Because the infiltration of other organizations is exactly the contrary of the ends they are pursuing, and because they refuse any incoherence within themselves, councilist organizations will prohibit any dual membership. As we have said, all the workers of a factory must take part in the council, or at least all those who accept the rules of its game. The solution to the problem of whether to accept participation in the council by “those who yesterday had to be thrown out of the factory at gunpoint” (Barth) will be found only in practice.

Ultimately, a councilist organization will stand or fall solely by the coherence of its theory and action and by its struggle for the complete elimination of all power remaining external to the councils or trying to make itself independent of them. But in order to simplify the discussion right off by refusing even to take into consideration a mass of councilist pseudo-organizations that may be simulated by students or obsessive professional militants, let us say that it does not seem to us that an organization can be recognized as councilist if it is not comprised of at least 2/3 workers. As this proportion might pass for a concession, let us add that it seems to us indispensable to correct it with this rider: in all delegations to central conferences at which decisions may be taken that have not previously been provided for by imperative mandates, workers must make up 3/4 of the participants. In sum, the inverse proportion of the first congresses of the “Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party.”

It is known that we have no inclination toward workerism of any form whatsoever. The above considerations refer to workers who have “become dialecticians,” as they will have to become *en masse* in the exercise of the power of the councils. But on the one hand, the workers continue to be the *central* force capable of bringing the existing functioning of society to a halt and the *indispensable* force for reinventing all its bases. On the other hand, although a councilist organization obviously must not separate other categories of wage-earners, notably intellectuals, from itself, it is in any case important that the dubious importance the latter may assume should be severely restricted: not only by verifying, by considering all aspects of their lives, that such intellectuals are really councilist revolutionaries, but also by seeing to it that there are as few of them in the organization as possible.

A councilist organization will not consent to speak on equal terms with other organizations unless they are consistent partisans of proletarian autonomy; just as the councils will not only have to free themselves from the grip of parties and unions, but must also reject any tendency aiming to pigeonhole them in some limited position and to negotiate with them as one power to another. The councils are the only power or they are nothing. The means of their victory are already their victory. With the lever of the councils *plus* the fulcrum of the total negation of the spectacle-commodity society, the Earth can be raised.

The victory of the councils is not the end of the revolution, but the beginning of it.

11.4 Gilles Dauvé, Leninism and the Ultra-Left (1969)

...

What is the ultra-left? It is both the product and one of the aspects of the revolutionary movement which followed the first world war and shook capitalist Europe without destroying it from 1917 to 1921 or 1923. Ultra-left ideas are rooted in that movement of the twenties, which was the expression of hundreds of thousands of revolutionary workers in Europe. That movement

remained a minority in the Communist International and opposed the general line of the international communist movement. The term suggests the character of the ultra-left. There is the right (the social-patriots, Noske...), the centre (Kautsky...), the left (Lenin and the Communist International), and the ultra-left. The ultra-left is primarily an opposition: an opposition within and against the German Communist Party (K.P.D.), within and against the Communist International. It asserts itself through a critique of the prevailing ideas of the communist movement, i.e., through a critique of Leninism.

The ultra-left was far from being a monolithic movement. Furthermore, its various components modified their conceptions. For instance, [Herman] Gorter's open letter to Lenin expresses a theory of the party which the ultra-left no longer accepts. On the two main points ("organization" and the content of socialism) we shall only study the ideas which the ultra-left has retained throughout its development. The French group I.C.O. is one of the best examples of a present-day ultra-left group.

A) The Problem of Organization

Ultra-left ideas are the product of a practical experience (mainly the workers' struggles in Germany) and of a theoretical critique (the critique of Leninism). For Lenin, the main revolutionary problem was to forge a "leadership" capable of leading the workers to victory. When ultra-leftists tried to give a theoretical explanation of the rise of factory organizations in Germany, they said the working class does not need a party in order to be revolutionary. Revolution would be made by the masses organized in workers' councils and not by a proletariat "led" by professional revolutionaries. The German Communist Workers' Party (K.A.P.D.), whose activity is expressed theoretically by Gorter in his "Reply to Lenin", regarded itself as a vanguard whose task was to enlighten the masses, not to lead them, as in Leninist theory. This conception was rejected by many ultra-leftists, who opposed the dual existence of the factory organizations and the party: revolutionaries must not try to organize themselves in a body distinct from the masses. That discussion led to the creation, in 1920, of the A.A.U.D.-E. (General Union of German Workers-Unitary Organization), which reproached the A.A.U.D. (General Labour Union of Germany) with being controlled by the K.A.P.D. (German Communist Workers' Party). The majority of the ultra-left movement adopted the same view as the A.A.U.D.-E. In France, I.C.O.'s present activity is based on the same principle: any revolutionary organization coexisting with the organs created by the workers themselves, and trying to elaborate a coherent theory and political line, must in the end attempt to lead the workers. Therefore revolutionaries do not organize themselves outside the organs "spontaneously" created by the workers: they merely exchange and circulate information and establish contacts with other revolutionaries; they never try to define a general theory or strategy.

To understand this conception, we must go back to Leninism. The Leninist theory of the party is based on a distinction which can be found in all the great socialist thinkers of the period: "labour movement" and "socialism" (revolutionary ideas, the doctrine, Scientific Socialism, Marxism, etc. – it can be given many different names) are two things which are fundamentally different and separate. There are workers and their daily struggles on the one hand, and there are the revolutionaries on the other. Lenin proceeds to state that revolutionary ideas must be "introduced" into the working class. The labour movement and the revolutionary movement are severed from each other: they must be united through the leadership of the revolutionaries over the workers. Therefore revolutionaries must be organized and must act on the working class "from the outside." Lenin's analysis, situating the revolutionaries outside the labour movement, seems to be based on fact: it appears that revolutionaries live in a totally different world from that of workers. Yet Lenin does not see

that this is an illusion. Marx's analysis and his scientific socialism as a whole are not the product of "bourgeois intellectuals", but of the class struggle on all its levels under capitalism. "Socialism" is the expression of the struggle of the proletariat. It was elaborated by "bourgeois intellectuals" (and by highly educated workers: J. Dietzgen) because only revolutionaries coming from the bourgeoisie were able to elaborate it, but it was the product of the class struggle.

The revolutionary movement, the dynamic that leads toward communism, is a result of capitalism. Let us examine Marx's conception of the party. The word, party, appears frequently in Marx's writings. We must make a distinction between Marx's principles on this question and his analyses of many aspects of the labour movement of his time. Many of those analyses were wrong (for example his view of the future of trade unionism). Moreover we cannot find a text where Marx summed up his ideas on the party, but only a number of scattered remarks and comments. Yet we believe that a general point of view emerges from all these texts. Capitalist society itself produces a communist party, which is nothing more than the organization of the objective movement (this implies that Kautsky's and Lenin's conception of a "socialist consciousness" which must be "brought" to the workers is meaningless) that pushes society toward communism. Lenin saw a reformist proletariat and said that something had to be done ("socialist consciousness" had to be introduced) in order to turn it into a revolutionary proletariat. Thus Lenin showed that he totally misunderstood class struggle. In a non-revolutionary period the proletariat cannot change capitalist production relations. It therefore tries to change capitalist distribution relations through its demand for higher wages. Of course the workers do not "know" that they are changing the distribution relations when they ask for higher wages. Yet they do try, "unconsciously", to act upon the capitalist system. Kautsky and Lenin do not see the process, the revolutionary movement created by capitalism; they only see one of its aspects. Kautsky's and Lenin's theory of class consciousness breaks up a process and considers only one of its transitory moments: for them the proletariat "by its own resources alone" can only be reformist, whereas the revolutionaries stand outside of the labour movement. In actual fact the revolutionaries and their ideas and theories originate in the workers' struggles.

In a non-revolutionary period, revolutionary workers, isolated in their factories, do their best to expose the real nature of capitalism and the institutions which support it (unions, "workers" parties). They usually do this with little success, which is quite normal. And there are revolutionaries (workers and non-workers) who read and write, who do their best to provide a critique of the whole system. They usually do this with little success, which is also quite normal. This division is produced by capitalism: one of the characteristics of capitalist society is the division between manual and intellectual work. This division exists in all the spheres of our society; it also exists in the revolutionary movement. It would be idealistic to expect the revolutionary movement to be "pure," as if it were not a product of our society. Inevitably the revolutionary movement under capitalism, that is communism, bears the stigma of capitalism.

Only the complete success of revolution can destroy this division. Until then we must fight against it; it characterizes our movement as much as it characterizes the rest of our society. It is inevitable that numerous revolutionaries are not greatly inclined to reading and are not interested in theory. This is a fact, a transitory fact. But "revolutionary workers" and "revolutionary theoreticians" are two aspects of the same process. It is wrong to say that the "theoreticians" must lead the "workers". But it is equally wrong to say, as I.C.O. says, that collectively organized theory is dangerous because it will result in leadership over the workers. I.C.O. merely takes a position symmetrical to Lenin's. The revolutionary process is an organic process, and although its components may be separate from each other for a certain time, the emergence of any revolutionary (or even pseudo-revolutionary) situation shows the profound unity of the various elements of the revolutionary movement

What happened in May, 1968, in the worker-student action committees at the Censier centre in Paris? Some (ultra-left) communists, who before these events had devoted most of their revolutionary activity to theory, worked with a minority of revolutionary workers. Before May, 1968 (and since then), they were no more separate from the workers than every worker is separate from other workers in a “normal”, non-revolutionary situation in capitalist society. Marx was not separate from the workers when he was writing *Capital*, nor when he was working in the Communist League or the International. When he worked in these organizations he felt neither the need (as Lenin), nor the fear (as I.C.O.), to become the leader of the workers.

Marx’s conception of the party as a historical product of capitalist society taking different forms according to the stage and the evolution of that society enables us to go beyond the dilemma: need of the party/fear of the party. The communist party is the spontaneous (i.e., totally determined by social evolution) organization of the revolutionary movement created by capitalism. The party is a spontaneous offspring, born on the historical soil of modern society. Both the will and the fear to “create” the party are illusions. It does not need to be created or not created: it is a mere historical product. Therefore revolutionaries have no need either to build it or fear to build it.

Lenin had a theory of the party. Marx had another theory of the party, which was quite different from Lenin’s. Lenin’s theory was an element in the defeat of the Russian revolution. The ultra-left rejected all theories of the party as dangerous and counter-revolutionary. Yet Lenin’s theory was not at the root of the defeat of the Russian revolution. Lenin’s theory only prevailed because the Russian revolution failed (mainly because of the absence of revolution in the West). One must not discard all theories of the party because one of them (Lenin’s) was a counter-revolutionary instrument. Unfortunately, the ultra-left merely adopted a conception which is the exact opposite of Lenin’s. Lenin had wanted to build a party; the ultra-left refused to build one. The ultra-left thus gave a different answer to the same wrong question: for or against the construction of the party. The ultra-left remained on the same ground as Lenin. We, on the contrary, do not want merely to reverse Lenin’s view; we want to abandon it altogether.

Modern Leninist groups (Trotskyist groups, for instance) try to organize the workers. Modern ultra-left groups (I.C.O., for instance) only circulate information without trying to adopt a collective position on a problem. As opposed to this, we believe it necessary to formulate a theoretical critique of present society. Such a critique implies collective work. We also think that any permanent group of revolutionary workers must try to find a theoretical basis for its action. Theoretical clarification is an element of, and a necessary condition for, practical unification.

B) Managing What?

The Russian revolution died because it ended up developing capitalism in Russia. To create an efficient body of managers became its motto. The ultra-left quickly concluded that bureaucratic management could not be socialism and they advocated workers’ management. A coherent ultra-left theory was created, with workers’ councils at its centre: the councils act as the fighting organs of the workers under capitalism and as the instruments of workers’ management under socialism. Thus the councils play the same central role in the ultra-left theory as the party in the Leninist theory.

The theory of workers’ management analyses capitalism in terms of its management. But is capitalism first of all a mode of management? The revolutionary analysis of capitalism started by Marx does not lay the stress on the question: who manages capital? On the contrary: Marx describes both capitalists and workers as mere functions of capital: “the capitalist as such is only

a function of capital, the labourer a function of labour power.” The Russian leaders do not “lead” the economy; they are led by it, and the entire development of the Russian economy obeys the objective laws of capitalist accumulation. In other words, the manager is at the service of definite and compelling production relations. Capitalism is not a mode of MANAGEMENT but a mode of PRODUCTION based on given PRODUCTION RELATIONS. Revolution must aim at these relations; we will try to analyse them briefly. The revolutionary analysis of capitalism emphasises the role of capital, whose objective laws are obeyed by the “managers” of the economy, both in Russia and in America.

C) The Law of Value

Capitalism is based on exchange: it first presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities.” But though it could not exist without exchange, capitalism is not merely the production of commodities; it grows and develops even by fighting against simple commodity production. Capital is fundamentally based on a particular type of exchange, the exchange between living labour and stored labour. The difference between Marx and the classical economists lies primarily in his creation of the concept of labour power: this concept reveals the secret of surplus-value, since it differentiates between necessary-labour and surplus labour.

How do commodities confront each other? By what mechanism can one determine that x quantity of A has the same value as y quantity of B ? Marx does not try to find the explanation for $xA = yB$ in the concrete nature of A and B , in their respective qualities, but in a quantitative relation: A and B can only be exchanged in the proportion $xA = yB$ because they both contain a quantity of “something common” to both of them. If we abstract the concrete and useful nature of A and B , they retain only one thing in common: they are both “products of labour”. A and B are exchanged in proportions determined by the respective quantities of labour crystallized in them. The quantities of labour are measured by their duration. The concept of socially necessary labour time, developed by further analysis, is an abstraction: one cannot calculate what an hour of socially necessary labour represents in a given society. But the distinction between abstract and concrete labour allows Marx to understand the mechanism of exchange and to analyse a particular form of exchange: the wage system.

The best points in my book are: 1) the two-fold character of labour, according to whether it is expressed in use value or exchange value. (All understanding of the facts depends upon this.) It is emphasized immediately, in the first chapter... (Marx’s letter to Engels, August 24, 1867)

Labour time, in fact, determines the entire social organization of production and distribution. It regulates the proportions in which the productive forces are used for specific purposes at specific places. The law of value “asserts itself as it determines the necessary proportions of social labour, not in the general sense which applies to all societies, but only in the sense required by capitalist society; in other words, it establishes a proportional distribution of the whole social labour according to the specific needs of capitalist production.” (Paul Mattick, *Value and Socialism*)

This is one of the reasons why capital will not be invested in a factory in India even though the production of that factory may be necessary to the survival of the population. Capital always goes where it can multiply quickly. The regulation by labour time compels capitalist society to develop a given production only where the labour time socially necessary for this production is at most equal to the average labour time.

Such is the logic of capital: exchange-value determined by average labour time.

D) The Contradiction of Labour Time

We mentioned the central role played by surplus labour in the production of surplus value. ...

Wage labour makes possible the production of surplus value through the appropriation of surplus labour by capital. In that sense the miserable condition which is the lot of the worker is a historical necessity. The worker must be compelled to furnish surplus labour. This is how the productive forces develop and increase the share of surplus labour in the working day:

Capital creates “a large quantity of disposable time. . . (i.e. room for the development of the individual’s full productive forces, hence those of society also)”.

The contradictory or “antithetical existence” of surplus labour is quite clear:

- it creates the “wealth of nations”,
- it brings nothing but misery to the workers who furnish it.

Capital “is thus, despite itself, instrumental in creating the means of social disposable time, in order to reduce labour time for the whole society to a diminishing minimum, and thus to free everyone’s time for their own development.”

In communism, the excess of time in relation to necessary labour time will lose the character of surplus labour which the historical limits of the productive forces had bestowed on it under capitalism. Disposable time will cease to be based on the poverty of labour. There will be no need to use misery to create wealth. When the relation between necessary labour and surplus labour is overthrown by the rise of the productive forces, the excess of time beyond labour needed for material existence will lose its transitory form of surplus labour.

Free time – which is both idle time and time for higher activity – has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the direct production process as this different subject.

The economy of labour time is an absolute necessity for the development of mankind. It lays the foundation for the possibility of capitalism and, at a higher stage, of communism. The same movement develops capitalism and makes communism both necessary and possible.

The law of value and measurement by average labour time are involved in the same process. The law of value expresses the limit of capitalism and plays a necessary part. As long as the productive forces are not yet highly developed and immediate labour remains the essential factor of production, measurement by average labour time is an absolute necessity. But with the development of capital, especially of fixed capital, “the creation of real wealth comes to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose ‘powerful effectiveness’ is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production.”

The misery of the proletariat has been the condition for a considerable growth of fixed capital, in which all the scientific and technical knowledge of mankind is “fixed”. Automation, the effects of which we are now beginning to see, is but one stage in this development. Yet capital continues to regulate production through the measurement of average labour time.

Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth. Hence it diminishes labour time in the necessary form so as to increase it in the superfluous form.

The well known contradiction productive forces/production relations cannot be understood if one does not see the link between the following oppositions:

a) contradiction between the function of average labour time as a regulator of “under-developed” productive forces, and the growth of productive forces which tends to destroy the necessity of such a function.

b) contradiction between the necessity of developing to a maximum the surplus labour of the worker in order to produce as much surplus value as possible, and the very growth of surplus labour which makes its suppression possible.

As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The surplus labour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non-labour of the few, for the development of the general powers of the human head.

“Human liberation”, prophesied by all utopian thinkers (past and present), is then possible:

With that, production based on exchange value breaks down... The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.

Every child knows that a nation which ceased to work, I will not say for a year, but even for a few weeks, would perish. Every child knows, too, that the masses of products corresponding to the different needs require different and quantitatively determined masses of the total labour of society. That this necessity of the distribution of social labour in definite proportions cannot possibly be done away with by a particular form of social production but can only change the mode of its appearance, is self evident. No natural laws can be done away with. What can change in historically different circumstances is only the form in which these laws assert themselves. (Marx’s letter to Kugelmann, July 11, 1868)

Marx opposes regulation by socially necessary labour time to regulation by available time. Of course these are not two methods which could be used or rejected, but two historical objective processes involving all social relations. Many people know the pages from the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* where Marx explains that “within the co-operative society based on common ownership of the means of production, the producers do not exchange their products; just as little does the labour employed on the products appear here as the value of these products, as a material quality possessed by them, since now, in contrast to capitalist society, individual labour no longer exists in an indirect fashion but directly as a component part of the total labour”. (Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*)

“To everybody according to his needs”, in Marx’s view, does not mean that “everything” will exist “in abundance”; the notion of absolute “abundance” is historically irrelevant. There will have to be some sort of calculation and choice, not on the basis of exchange value, but on the basis of use value, of the social utility of the considered product. (Thereby the problem of “undeveloped countries” will be seen and treated in a new way.) Marx was quite clear about this in *The Poverty of Philosophy*:

In a future society, in which class antagonism will have ceased, in which there will no longer be any classes, use will no longer be determined by the minimum time of production; but the time of production devoted to different articles will be determined by the degree of their social utility. (Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*)

Thus the text on the passage from the “realm of necessity” to the “realm of freedom” (Marx, *Capital, Vol.III*) is elucidated. Freedom is regarded as a relation where man, mastering the process of production of material life, will at last be able to adapt his aspirations to the level reached by the development of the productive forces. The growth of social wealth and the development of every individuality coincide.

“For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time”. Thus Marx is quite right to describe time as the dimension of human liberation.

Furthermore, it is clear that the dynamics analysed by Marx excludes the hypothesis of any gradual way to communism through the progressive destruction of the law of value. On the contrary, the law of value keeps asserting itself violently until the overthrow of capitalism: the law of value never ceases destroying itself – only to reappear at a higher level. We have seen that the movement which gave birth to it tends to destroy its necessity. But it never ceases to exist and to regulate the functioning of the system. A revolution is therefore necessary.

The theory of the management of society through workers’ councils does not take the dynamics of capitalism into account. It retains all the categories and characteristics of capitalism: wage-labour, law of value, exchange. The sort of socialism it proposes is nothing other than capitalism – democratically managed by the workers. If this were put into practice there would be two possibilities: either the workers’ councils would try not to function as in capitalist enterprises, which would be impossible since capitalist production relations would still exist. In this case the workers’ councils would be destroyed by counter-revolution. Production relations are not man-to-man relations, but the combination of the various elements of the process of labour. The “human” relation leaders/led is only a secondary form of the fundamental relation between wage-labour and capital. Or the workers’ councils would consent to functioning as capitalist enterprises. In this case the system of councils would not survive; it would become an illusion, one of the numerous forms of association between Capital and Labour. “Elected” managers would soon become identical to traditional capitalists: the function of capitalist, says Marx, tends to separate from the function of worker. Workers’ management would result in capitalism; in other words, capitalism would not have been destroyed.

The Bolshevik bureaucracy took the economy under its control. The ultra-left wants the masses to do this. The ultra-left remains on the same ground as Leninism: it once again gives a different answer to the same question (the management of the economy). We want to replace that question with a different one (the destruction of that economy, which is capitalist). Socialism is not the management, however “democratic” it may be, of capital, but its complete destruction.

E) The Historical Limit of the Ultra-Left

Our examination of the problem of “organization” and of the content of socialism has led us to affirm the existence of a revolutionary dynamic under capitalism. Produced by capitalism, the revolutionary movement assumes new forms in a new situation. Socialism is not merely the management of society by the workers, but the termination of the historical cycle of capital by the proletariat. The proletariat does not only seize the world; it also concludes the movement of capitalism and exchange. This is what distinguishes Marx from all utopian and reformist thinkers; socialism is

produced by the objective dynamics which created capital and spread it all over the planet. Marx insists on the content of the movement. Lenin and the ultra-left insisted on its forms: form of organization, form of management of society, while they forgot the content of the revolutionary movement. This, too, was a historical product. The situation of the period prevented revolutionary struggles from having a communist content.

Leninism expressed the impossibility of revolution in his time. Councilism expressed its necessity, but without seeing exactly where its possibility lies. Marx's ideas on the party were abandoned. It was the time of the large reformist organizations, then of the communist parties (which quickly or immediately sank into another form of reformism). The revolutionary movement was not strong enough. Everywhere, in Germany, in Italy, in France, in Great Britain, the beginning of the twenties was marked by the control of the masses by "workers'" leaders. Reacting against this situation, ultra-leftists were driven to the point where they feared to become the new bureaucrats. Instead of understanding the Leninist parties as a product of proletarian defeat, they refused any party, and like Lenin let the Marxist conception of the party remain in oblivion. As for the content of socialism, all social movements, except in Spain for a short time, tried to administer capitalism and not to overthrow it. In such conditions the ultra-left could not make a profound critique of Leninism. They could only take the opposite view, and oppose other forms to Leninism, without seeing the content of revolution. This was all the more natural as that content did not clearly appear. (We must nevertheless remember that the ultra-left provided a remarkable critique of some aspects of capitalism – unionism and "workers'" parties).

These are the reasons why the ultra-left movement only replaced the Leninist fetishism of the party and class-consciousness with the fetishism of workers' councils. The critique of both Leninism and ultra-leftism is now possible because the development of capitalism gives us an idea of the real content of the revolutionary movement.

By holding on to the ultra-left ideas we presented (fear of creating the party, and workers' management), we would turn them into mere ideology. When these ideas first appeared around 1920, they expressed a real revolutionary struggle, and even their "mistakes" played a positive and progressive role in the struggles against social democracy and Leninism. Their limits were the expression of the activity of thousands of revolutionary workers. But things have changed a great deal since 1920. A new revolutionary workers' minority is in a slow process of formation, as was revealed by the 1968 events in France, and by other struggles in several countries.

In a revolutionary period, the revolutionary fights alongside the proletariat without any theoretical or sociological problem. The revolutionary movement gets unified. Theoretical coherence is a permanent objective of the revolutionaries, as it always hastens the practical co-ordination of revolutionary efforts. Revolutionaries never hesitate to act collectively in order to propagate their critique of the existing society.

They do not try to tell the workers what to do; but they do not refrain from intervening under the pretext that "the workers must decide for themselves". For, on the one hand, the workers only decide to do what the general situation compels them to do; and on the other, the revolutionary movement is an organic structure of which theory is an inseparable and indispensable element. Communists represent and defend the general interests of the movement. In all situations, they do not hesitate to express the whole meaning of what is going on, and to make practical proposals. If the expression is right and the proposal appropriate, they are parts of the struggle of the proletariat and contribute to build the "party" of the communist revolution.

Week 12

Second-Wave Feminism

In contrast to first-wave feminism, second-wave feminism had a multiplicity of objectives. In their writings, feminist theorists addressed gender roles, gender preference, sexual pleasure, sex work, abortion, birth control, domestic violence, child bearing and rearing, family dynamics, etc. Women's perception that these topics were being marginalized – and that they themselves were being marginalized – within Left movements initiated this wave of feminist activity.

The readings for this week focus on the issue of women's domestic work. Selma James, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Silvia Federici argue for wages for housework – i.e. the right for a woman to be compensated for her previously unwaged labor. James and Dalla Costa's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* and Federici's *Wages Against Housework* expound upon this subject.

The Eley chapter for this week is 22.

12.1 Mariarosa Dalla Costa & Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1971)

These observations are an attempt to define and analyze the “Woman Question”, and to locate this question in the entire “female role” as it has been created by the capitalist division of labor.

We place foremost in these pages the housewife as the central figure in this female role. We assume that all women are housewives and even those who work outside the home continue to be housewives. That is, on a world level, it is precisely what is particular to domestic work, not only measured as number of hours and nature of work, but as quality of life and quality of relationships which it generates, that determines a woman's place wherever she is and to whichever class she belongs. We concentrate here on the position of the working class woman, but this is not to imply that only working class women are exploited. Rather it is to confirm that the role of the working class housewife, which we believe has been indispensable to capitalist production, is *the* determinant for the position of all other women. Every analysis of women as a caste, then, must proceed from the analysis of the position of working class housewives.

In order to see the housewife as central, it was first of all necessary to analyze briefly how capitalism has created the modern family and the housewife's role in it, by destroying the types of family group or community which previously existed.

This process is by no means complete. While we are speaking of the Western world and Italy in particular, we wish to make clear that to the extent that the capitalist mode of production also brings the Third World under its command, the same process of destruction must and is taking place there. Nor should we take for granted that the family as we know it today in the most technically advanced Western countries is the final form the family can assume under capitalism. But the analysis of new tendencies can only be the product of an analysis of how capitalism created this family and what woman's role is today, each as a moment in a process.

We propose to complete these observations on the female role by analyzing as well the position of the woman who works outside the home, but this is for a later date. We wish merely to indicate here the link between two apparently separate experiences: that of housewife and that of working woman.

The day-to-day struggles that women have developed since the second world war run directly against the organization of the factory and of the home. The "unreliability" of women in the home and out of it has grown rapidly since then, and runs directly against the factory as regimentation organized in time and space, and against the social factory as organization of the reproduction of labor power. This trend to more absenteeism, to less respect for timetables, to higher job mobility, is shared by young men and women workers. But where the man for crucial periods of his youth will be the sole support of a new family, women who on the whole are not restrained in this way and who must always consider the job at home, are bound to be even more disengaged from work discipline, forcing disruption of the productive flow and therefore higher costs to capital. (This is one excuse for the discriminatory wages which many times over make up for capital's loss.) It is this same trend of disengagement that groups of housewives express when they leave their children with their husbands at work. This trend is and will increasingly be one of the decisive forms of the crisis in the systems of the factory and of the social factory.

In recent years, especially in the advanced capitalist countries, there have developed a number of women's movements of different orientations and range, from those which believe the fundamental conflict in society is between men and women to those focusing on the position of women as a specific manifestation of class exploitation.

If at first sight the position and attitudes of the former are perplexing, especially to women who have had previous experience of militant participation in political struggles, it is, we think, worth pointing out that women for whom sexual exploitation is the basic social contradiction provide an extremely important index of the degree of our own frustration, experienced by millions of women both inside and outside the movement. There are those who define their own lesbianism in these terms (we refer to views expressed by a section of the movement in the US in particular): "Our associations with women began when, because we were together, we could acknowledge that we could no longer tolerate relationships with men, that we could not prevent these from becoming power relationships in which we were inevitably subjected. Our attentions and energies were diverted, our power was diffused and its objectives delimited." From this rejection has developed a movement of gay women which asserts the possibilities of a relationship free of a sexual power struggle, free of the biological social unit, and asserts at the same time our need to open ourselves to a wider social and therefore sexual potential.

Now in order to understand the frustrations of women expressing themselves in ever-increasing forms, we must be clear what in the nature of the family under capitalism precipitates a crisis on

this scale. The oppression of women, after all, did not begin with capitalism. What began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women *as* women and the possibility at last of their liberation.

The origins of the capitalist family

In pre-capitalist patriarchal society *the home and the family* were central to agricultural and artisan production. With the advent of capitalism the socialization of production was organized with *the factory* as its center. Those who worked in the new productive center, the factory, received a wage. Those who were excluded did not. Women, children and the aged lost the relative power that derived from the family's dependence on their labor, *which was seen to be social and necessary*. Capital, destroying the family and the community and production as one whole, on the one hand has concentrated basic social production in the factory and the office, and on the other has in essence detached the man from the family and turned him into a *wage laborer*. It has put on the man's shoulders the burden of financial responsibility for women, children, the old and the ill, in a word, all those who do not receive wages. From that moment began the expulsion from the home of all those who did not *procreate and service those who worked for wages*. *The first to be excluded from the home, after men, were children; they sent children to school. The family ceased to be not only the productive, but also the educational center.*

To the extent that men had been the despotic heads of the patriarchal family, based on a strict division of labor, the experience of women, children and men was a contradictory experience which we inherit. But in pre-capitalist society the work of each member of the community of serfs was seen to be directed to a purpose: either to the prosperity of the feudal lord or to our survival. To this extent the whole community of serfs was compelled to be co-operative in a unity of unfreedom that involved to the same degree women, children and men, which capitalism had to break. In this sense the *unfree individual*, the *democracy of unfreedom*, entered into a crisis. The passage from serfdom to free labor power separated the male from the female proletariat and both of them from their children. The unfree patriarch was transformed into the "free" wage earner, and upon the contradictory experience of the sexes and the generations was built a more profound estrangement and therefore a more subversive relation.

We must stress that this separation of children from adults is essential to an understanding of the full significance of the separation of women from men, to grasp fully how the organization of the struggle on the part of the women's movement, even when it takes the form of a violent rejection of any possibility of relations with men, can only aim to overcome the separation which is based on the "freedom" of wage labor.

The class struggle in education

The analysis of the school which has emerged during recent years – particularly with the advent of the students' movement – has clearly identified the school as a center of ideological discipline and of the shaping of the labor force and its masters. What has perhaps never emerged, or at least not in its profundity, is precisely what precedes all this; and that is the usual desperation of children on their first day of nursery school, when they see themselves dumped into a class and their parents suddenly desert them. *But it is precisely at this point that the whole story of school begins.*

Seen in this way, the elementary school children are not those appendages who, merely by the demands "free lunches, free fares, free books", learnt from the older ones, can in some way be united with the students of the higher schools. In elementary school children, in those who are the

sons and daughters of workers, there is always an awareness that school is in some way setting them against their parents *and their peers*, and consequently there is an instinctive resistance to studying and to being “educated”. This is the resistance for which Black children are confined to educationally subnormal schools in Britain. The European working class child, like the Black working class child, sees in the teacher somebody who is teaching him or her something against her mother and father, not as a defense of the child but as an attack on the class. Capitalism is the first productive system where the children of the exploited are disciplined and educated in institutions organized and controlled by the ruling class.

The final proof that this alien indoctrination which begins in nursery school is based on the splitting of the family is that those working class children who arrive (those few who do arrive) at university are so brainwashed that they are unable any longer to talk to their community.

Working class children then are the first who instinctively rebel against schools and the education provided in schools. But their parents carry them to schools and confine them to schools because they are concerned that their children should “have an education”, that is, be equipped to escape the assembly line or the kitchen to which they, the parents, are confined. If a working class child shows particular aptitudes, the whole family immediately concentrates on this child, gives him the best conditions, often sacrificing the others, hoping and gambling that he will carry them all out of the working class. This in effect becomes the way capital moves through the aspirations of the parents to enlist their help in disciplining fresh labor power.

In Italy parents less and less succeed in sending their children to school. Children’s resistance to school is always increasing even when this resistance is not yet organized.

At the same time that the resistance of children grows to being educated in schools, so does *their refusal to accept the definition* that capital has given of their age. Children want everything they see; they do not yet understand that in order to have things one must pay for them, and in order to pay for them one must have a wage, and therefore one must also be an adult. No wonder it is not easy to explain to children why they cannot have what television has told them they cannot live without.

But something is happening among the new generation of children and youth which is making it steadily more difficult to explain to them the arbitrary point at which they reach adulthood. Rather the younger generation is demonstrating their age to us: in the sixties six-year-olds have already come up against police dogs in the South of the United States. Today we find the same phenomenon in Southern Italy and Northern Ireland, where children have been as active in the revolt as adults. When children (and women) are recognized as integral to history, no doubt other examples will come to light of very young people’s participation (and of women’s) in revolutionary struggles. What is new is the autonomy of their participation *in spite of and because of* their exclusion from direct production. In the factories youth refuse the leadership of older workers, and in the revolts in the cities they are the diamond point. In the metropolis generations of the nuclear family have produced youth and student movements that have initiated the process of shaking the framework of constituted power: in the Third World the unemployed youth are often in the streets before the working class organized in trade unions.

It is worth recording what *The Times* of London (1 June 1971) reported concerning a head-teachers’ meeting called because one of them was admonished for hitting a pupil: “Disruptive and irresponsible elements lurk around every corner with the seemingly planned intention of eroding all forces of authority.” This “is a plot to destroy the values on which our civilization is built and on which our schools are some of the finest bastions.”

The exploitation of the wageless

We wanted to make these few comments on the attitude of revolt that is steadily spreading among children and youth, especially from the working class and particularly Black people, because we believe this to be intimately connected with the explosion of the women's movement and something which the Women's movement itself must take into account. We are dealing with the revolt of those who have been excluded, who have been separated by the system of production, and who express in action their need to destroy the forces that stand in the way of their social existence, but who this time are coming together as individuals.

Women and children have been excluded. The revolt of the one against exploitation through exclusion is an index of the revolt of the other.

To the extent to which capital has recruited the man and turned him into a wage laborer, it has created a fracture between him and all the other proletarians without a wage who, not participating directly in social production, were thus presumed incapable of being the subjects of social revolt.

Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage, that is, that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage laborer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organizations of the working class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage laborer been organized. This exploitation has been even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it. That is, the wage commanded a larger amount of labor than appeared in factory bargaining. *Where women are concerned, their labor appears to be a personal service outside of capital.* The woman seemed only to be suffering from male chauvinism, being pushed around because capitalism meant general "injustice" and "bad and unreasonable behavior"; the few (men) who noticed convinced us that this was "oppression" but not exploitation. But "oppression" hid another and more pervasive aspect of capitalist society. Capital excluded children from the home and sent them to school not only because they are in the way of others' more "productive" labor or only to indoctrinate them. The rule of capital through the wage compels every able-bodied person to function, under the law of division of labor, and to function in ways that are if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension of the rule of capital. That, fundamentally, is the meaning of school. *Where children are concerned, their labor appears to be learning for their own benefit.*

Proletarian children have been forced to undergo the same education in the schools: this is capitalist levelling against the infinite possibilities of learning. Woman on the other hand has been isolated in the home, forced to carry out work that is considered unskilled, the work of giving birth to, raising, disciplining, and servicing the worker for production. Her role in the cycle of social production remained invisible because only the product of her labor, *the laborer*, was visible there. She herself was thereby trapped within pre-capitalist working conditions and never paid a wage.

And when we say "pre-capitalist working conditions" we do not refer only to women who have to use brooms to sweep. Even the best equipped American kitchens do not reflect the present level of technological development; at most they reflect the technology of the 19th century. If you are not paid by the hour, within certain limits, nobody cares how long it takes you to do your work.

This is not only a *quantitative* but a *qualitative* difference from other work, and it stems precisely from the kind of commodity that this work is destined to produce. Within the capitalist system generally, the productivity of labor doesn't increase unless there is a confrontation between capital and class: technological innovations and co-operation are at the same time moments of attack for the working class and moments of capitalistic response. But if this is true for the production of commodities generally, this has not been true for the production of that special kind of commodity, labor power. If technological innovation can lower the limit of necessary work, and if the working

class struggle in industry can use that innovation for gaining free hours, the same cannot be said of housework; to the extent that she must *in isolation* procreate, raise and be responsible for children, a high mechanization of domestic chores doesn't free any time for the woman. She is always on duty, for the machine doesn't exist that makes and minds children. A higher productivity of domestic work through mechanization, then, can be related only to specific services, for example, cooking, washing, cleaning. Her workday is unending not because she has no machines, but because she is isolated.

Confirming the myth of female incapacity

With the advent of the capitalist mode of production, then, women were relegated to a condition of isolation, enclosed within the family cell, dependent in every aspect on men. The new autonomy of the free wage slave was denied her, and she remained in a pre-capitalist stage of personal dependence, but this time more brutalized because in contrast to the large-scale highly socialized production which now prevails. Woman's apparent incapacity to do certain things, to understand certain tilings, originated in her history, which is a history very similar in certain respects to that of "backward" children in specialist classes. To the extent that women were cut off from direct socialized production and isolated in the home, all possibilities of social life outside the neighborhood were denied them, and hence they were deprived of social knowledge and social education. When women are deprived of wide experience of organizing and planning collectively industrial and other mass struggles, they are denied a basic source of education, the experience of social revolt. And this experience is primarily the experience of learning your own capacities, that is, your power, and the capacities, the power, of your class. Thus the isolation from which women have suffered has confirmed to society and to themselves the myth of female incapacity.

It is this myth which has hidden, firstly, that to the degree that the working class has been able to organize mass struggles in the community, rent strikes, struggles against inflation generally, the basis has always been the unceasing informal organization of women there; secondly, that in struggles in the cycle of direct production women's support and organization, formal and informal, has been decisive. At critical moments this unceasing network of women surfaces and develops through the talents, energies and strength of the "incapable female". But the myth does not die. Where women could together with men claim the victory-to survive (during unemployment) or to survive and win (during strikes) – the spoils of the victor belonged to the class "in general". Women rarely if ever got anything specifically for themselves; rarely if ever did the struggle have as an objective in any way altering the power structure of the home and its relation to the factory. Strike or unemployment, a woman's work is never done.

The capitalist function of the uterus

Never as with the advent of capitalism has the destruction of woman as a person meant also the immediate diminution of her *physical integrity*. Feminine and masculine sexuality had already before capitalism undergone a series of regimes and forms of conditioning. But they had also undergone efficient methods of birth control, which have unaccountably disappeared. Capital established the family as the nuclear family and subordinated within it the woman to the man, as the person who, not directly participating in social production, does not present herself independently on the labor market. As it cuts off all her possibilities of creativity and of the development of her working activity, so it cuts off the expression of her sexual, psychological and emotional autonomy.

We repeat: never had such a stunting of the physical integrity woman taken place, affecting everything from the brain to the uterus. Participating with others in the production of a train, a car or an airplane is not the same thing as using in isolation the same broom in the same few square feet of kitchen for centuries.

This is not a call for equality of men and women in the construction of airplanes, but it is merely to assume that the difference between the two histories not only determines the differences in the actual forms of struggle but brings also finally to light what has been invisible for so long: the different forms women's struggles have assumed in the past. In the same way as women are robbed of the possibility of developing their creative capacity, they are robbed of their sexual life which has been transformed into a function for reproducing labor power: the same observations which we made on the technological level of domestic services apply to birth control (and, by the way, to the whole field of gynecology), research into which until recently has been continually neglected, while women have been forced to have children and were forbidden the right to have abortions when, as was to be expected, the most primitive techniques of birth control failed.

From this complete diminution of woman, capital constructed the female role, and has made the man in the family the instrument of this reduction. The man as wage worker and head of the family was the specific instrument of this specific exploitation which is the exploitation of women.

The homosexuality of the division of labour

In this sense we can explain to what extent the degraded relationships between men and women are determined by the fracturing that society has imposed between man and woman, subordinating woman as object, the "complement" to man. And in this sense we can see the validity of the explosion of tendencies within the women's movement in which women want to conduct their struggle against men as such and no longer wish to use their strength to sustain even sexual relationships with them, since each of these relationships is always frustrating. A power relation precludes any possibility of affection and intimacy. Yet between men and women power as its right *commands* sexual affection and intimacy. In this sense, the gay movement is the most massive attempt to disengage sexuality and power.

But homosexuality generally is at the same time rooted in the framework of capitalist society itself: women at home and men in factories and offices, separated one from the other for the whole day; or a typical factory of 1,000 women with 10 foremen; or a typing pool (of women, of course) which works for 50 professional men. All these situations are already a homosexual framework of living.

Capital, while it elevates heterosexuality to a religion, at the same time in practice makes it impossible for men and women to be in touch with each other, physically or emotionally – it undermines heterosexuality except as a sexual, economic and social discipline. We believe that this is a reality from which we must begin. The explosion of the gay tendencies have been and are important for the movement precisely because they pose the urgency to claim for itself the specificity of women's struggle and above all to clarify in all their depths all facets and connections of the exploitation of women.

Surplus value and the social factory

At this point then we would like to begin to clear the ground of a certain point of view which orthodox Marxism, especially in the ideology and practice of so-called Marxist parties, has always taken for granted. And this is: when women remain outside social production, that is, outside the

socially organized productive cycle, they are also outside social productivity. The role of women, in other words, has always been seen as that of a psychologically subordinated person who, except where she is marginally employed outside the home, is outside production; essentially a supplier of a series of use values in the home. This basically was the viewpoint of Marx who, observing what happened to women working in the factories, concluded that it might have been better for them to be at home, where resided a morally higher form of life. But the true nature of the role of housewife never emerges clearly in Marx. Yet observers have noted that Lancashire women, cotton workers for over a century, are more sexually free and helped by men in domestic chores. On the other hand, in the Yorkshire coal mining districts where a low percentage of women worked outside the home, women are more dominated by the figure of the husband. Even those who have been able to define the exploitation of women in socialised production could not then go on to understand the exploited position of women in the home; men are too compromised in their relationship with women. For that reason only women can define themselves and move on the woman question.

We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value. This is true of the entire female role as a personality which is subordinated at all levels, physical, psychical and occupational, which has had and continues to have a precise and vital place in the capitalist division of labor, *in pursuit of productivity at the social level*. Let us examine more specifically the role of women as a source of social productivity, that is, of surplus value making. Firstly within the family.

A. The Productivity Of Wage Slavery Based On Unwaged Slavery

It is often asserted that, within the definition of wage labor, women in domestic labor are not productive. In fact precisely the opposite is true if one thinks of the enormous quantity of social services which capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives. Domestic labor is not essentially “feminine work”; a woman doesn’t fulfill herself more or get less exhausted than a man from washing and cleaning. These are social services inasmuch as they serve the reproduction of labor power. And capital, precisely by instituting its family structure, has “liberated” the man from these functions so that he is completely “free” for direct exploitation; so that he is free to “earn” enough for a woman to reproduce him as labor power. It has made men wage slaves, then, to the degree that it has succeeded in allocating these services to women in the family, and by the same process controlled the flow of women onto the labor market. In Italy women are still necessary in the home and capital still needs this form of the family. At the present level of development in Europe generally, in Italy in particular, capital still prefers to import its labor power – in the form of millions of men from underdeveloped areas – while at the same time consigning women to the home.

And women are of service not only because they carry out domestic labor *without a wage and without going on strike*, but also because they always receive back into the home all those who are periodically expelled from their jobs by economic crisis. The family, this maternal cradle always ready to help and protect in time of need, has been in fact the best guarantee that the unemployed do not immediately become a horde of disruptive outsiders.

The organized parties of the working class movement have been careful not to raise the question of domestic work. Aside from the fact that they have always treated women as a lower form of life, even in factories, to raise this question would be to challenge the whole basis of the trade unions as organizations that deal (a) only with the factory; (b) only with a measured and “paid” work day; (c) only with that side of wages which is given to us and not with the side of wages which is taken

back, that is, inflation. Women have always been forced by the working class parties to put off their liberation to some hypothetical future, making it dependent on the gains that men, limited in the scope of their struggles by these parties, win for “themselves”.

In reality, every phase of working class struggle has fixed the subordination and exploitation of women at a higher level. The proposal of pensions for housewives (and this makes us wonder why not a wage) serves only to show the complete willingness of these parties further to institutionalize women as housewives and men (and women) as wage slaves.

Now it is clear that not one of us believes that emancipation, liberation, can be achieved through work. Work is still work, whether inside or outside the home. The independence of the wage earner means only being a “free individual” for capital, no less for women than for men. Those who advocate that the liberation of the working class woman lies in her getting a job outside the home are part of the problem, not the solution. Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink. To deny this is also to deny the slavery of the assembly line itself, proving again that if you don’t know how women are exploited, you can never really know how men are. But this question is so crucial that we deal with it separately. What we wish to make clear here is that by the non-payment of a wage when we are producing in a world capitalistically organized, the figure of the boss is concealed behind that of the husband. He appears to be the sole recipient of domestic services, and this gives an ambiguous and slavish character to housework. The husband and children, through their loving involvement, their loving blackmail, become the first foremen, the immediate controllers of this labor.

The husband tends to read the paper and wait for his dinner to be cooked and served, even when his wife goes out to work as he does and comes home with him. Clearly, the specific form of exploitation represented by domestic work demands a correspondingly specific form of struggle, namely the women’s struggle, *within the family*.

If we fail to grasp completely that precisely this family is the very pillar of the capitalist organization of work, if we make the mistake of regarding it only as a superstructure, dependent for change only on the stages of the struggle in the factories, then we will be moving in a limping revolution that will always perpetuate and *aggravate a basic contradiction in the class struggle, and a contradiction which is functional to capitalist development*. We would, in other words, be perpetuating the error of considering ourselves as producers of use values only, of considering housewives external to the working class. As long as housewives are considered external to the class, the class struggle at every moment and any point is impeded, frustrated, and unable to find full scope for its action. To elaborate this further is not our task here. To expose and condemn domestic work as a masked form of productive labor, however, raises a series of questions concerning both the aims and the forms of struggle of women.

Socializing the struggle of the isolated laborer

In fact, the demand that would follow, namely “pay us wages for housework”, would run the risk of looking, in the light of the present relationship of forces in Italy, as though we wanted further to entrench the condition of institutionalized slavery which is produced with the condition of housework – therefore such a demand could scarcely operate in practice as a mobilizing goal. The question is, therefore, to develop forms of struggle which do not leave the housewife peacefully at home, at most ready to take part in occasional demonstrations through the streets, waiting for a wage that would never pay for anything; rather we must discover forms of struggle which immediately break the whole structure of domestic work, rejecting it absolutely, rejecting our role as housewives and the

home as the ghetto of our existence, since the problem is not only to stop doing this work, but to smash the entire role of housewife. *The starting point is not how to do housework more efficiently, but how to find a place as protagonist in the struggle, that is, not a higher productivity of domestic labor but a higher subversiveness in the struggle.*

To immediately overthrow the relation between time-given-to-housework and time-not-given-to-housework: it is not necessary to spend time each day ironing sheets and curtains, cleaning the floor until it sparkles nor to dust every day. And yet many women still do that. Obviously it is not because they are stupid: once again we are reminded of the parallel we made earlier with the ESN school. In reality, it is only in this work that they can realize an identity precisely because, as we said before, capital has cut them off from the process of socially organized production.

But it does not automatically follow that to be cut off from socialized production is to be cut off from socialized struggle: struggle, however, demands time away from housework, and at the same time it offers an alternative identity to the woman who before found it only at the level of the domestic ghetto. In the sociality of struggle women discover and exercise a power that effectively gives them a new identity. *The new identity is and can only be a new degree of social power.*

The possibility of social struggle arises out of the *socially productive character* of women's work in the home. It is not only or mainly the social services provided in the home that make women's role socially productive, even though in fact at this moment these services are identified with women's role. But capital can technologically improve the conditions of this work. Whilst capital does not want to do for the time being, in Italy at least, is to destroy the position of the housewife as the pivot of the nuclear family. For this reason there is no point in our waiting for the automation of domestic work, because this will never happen: the maintenance of the nuclear family is in compatible with the automation of these services. To really automate them, capital would have to destroy the family as we know it; that is, it would be driven to *socialize* in order to *automate* fully.

But we know all too well what their socialization means: it is always at the very least the opposite of the Paris Commune!

The new leap that capitalist reorganization could make and that we can already smell in the U.S. and in the more advanced capitalist countries generally is to destroy the pre-capitalist relation of production in the home by constructing a family which more nearly reflects capitalist equality and its domination through co-operative labor; to transcend "the incompleteness of capitalist development" in the home, with the pre-capitalist, unfree woman as its pivot, and make the family more nearly reflect in its form its capitalist productive function, the reproduction of labor power.

To return then to what we said above: women, housewives, identifying themselves with the home, tend to a compulsive perfection in their work. We all know the saying too well: you can always find work to do in a house.

They don't see beyond their own four walls. The housewife's situation as a pre-capitalist mode of labor and consequently this "femininity" imposed upon her, makes her see the world, the others and the entire organization of work as a something which is obscure, essentially unknown and unknowable; not lived; perceived only as a shadow behind the shoulders of the husband who goes out each day and meets this something.

So when we say that women must overthrow the relation of domestic-work-time to non-domestic-time and must begin to move out of the home, we mean their point of departure must be precisely this willingness to destroy the role of housewife, in order to begin to come together with other women, not only as neighbors and friends but as workmates and anti-workmates; thus breaking the tradition of privatized female, with all its rivalry, and reconstructing a real solidarity among women: not solidarity for defense but solidarity for attack, for the organization of the struggle.

A common solidarity against a common form of labor. In the same way, women must stop meeting their husbands and children only as wife and mother, that is, at mealtime after they have come home from the outside world.

Every place of struggle outside the home, precisely because *every sphere of capitalist organization presupposes the home*, offers a chance for attack by women; factory meetings, neighborhood meetings, student assemblies, each of them are legitimate places for women's struggle, where women can encounter and confront men – women versus men, if you like, but as individuals, rather than mother-father, son-daughter, with all the possibilities this offers to explode outside of the house the contradictions, the frustrations, that capital has wanted to implode within the family.

A new compass for class struggle

If women demand in workers' assemblies that the night-shift be abolished because at night, besides sleeping, one wants to make love – and it's not the same as making love during the day if the women work during the day – that would be advancing their own independent interests as women against the social organization of work, refusing to be unsatisfied mothers for their husbands and children.

But in this new intervention and confrontation women are also expressing that their interests as women are not, as they have been told, separate and alien from the interests of the class. For too long political parties, especially of the left, and trade unions have determined and confined the areas of working class struggle. To make love and to refuse night work to make love, *is in the interest of the class*. To explore why it is women and not men who raise the question is to shed new light on the whole history of the class.

To meet your sons and daughters at a student assembly is to discover them as individuals who speak among other individuals; it is too present yourself to them as an individual. Many women have had abortions and very many have given birth. We can't see why they should not express their point of view as women first, whether or not they are students, in an assembly of medical students. (We do not give the medical faculty as an example by accident. In the lecture hall and in the clinic, we can see once more the exploitation of the working class not only when third class patients exclusively are made the guinea pigs for research. Women especially are the prime objects of experimentation and also of the sexual contempt, sadism, and professional arrogance of doctors.)

To sum up: the most important thing becomes precisely this explosion of the women's movement as an expression of the specificity of female interests hitherto castrated from all its connections by the capitalist organization of the family. This has to be waged in every quarter of this society, each of which is founded precisely on the suppression of such interests, since the entire class exploitation has been built upon the specific mediation of women's exploitation.

And so as a women's movement we must pinpoint every single area in which this exploitation is located, that is, we must regain the whole specificity of the female interest in the course of waging the struggle.

Every opportunity is a good one: housewives of families threatened with eviction can object that their housework has more than covered the rent of the months they didn't pay. On the out-skirts of Milan, many families have already taken up this form of struggle.

Electric appliances in the home are lovely things to have, but for the workers who make them, to make many is to spend time and to exhaust yourself. That every wage has to buy all of them is tough, and presumes that every wife must run all these appliances alone; and this only means that she is frozen in the home, but now on a more mechanized level. Lucky worker, lucky wife!

The question is not to have communal canteens. We must remember that capital makes Fiat for

the workers first, then their canteen.

For this reason to demand a communal canteen in the neighborhood without integrating this demand into a practice of struggle against the organization of labor, against labor time, risks giving the impetus for a new leap that, on the community level, would regiment none other than women in some alluring work so that we will then have the possibility at lunchtime of eating shit collectively in the canteen.

We want them to know that this is not the canteen we want, nor do we want play centers or nurseries of the same order. We want canteens too, and nurseries and washing machines and dishwashers, but we also want choices: to eat in privacy with few people when we want, to have time to be with children, to be with old people, with the sick, when and where we choose. To “have time” means to work less. To have time to be with children, the old and the sick does not mean running to pay a quick visit to the garages where you park children or old people or invalids. It means that we, the first to be excluded, are taking the initiative in this struggle so that all those other excluded people, the children, the old and the ill, can re-appropriate the social wealth; to be re-integrated with us and all of us with men, not as dependents but autonomously, as we women want for ourselves; since their exclusion, like ours, from the directly productive social process, from social existence, has been created by capitalist organization.

The refusal of work

Hence we must refuse housework as women’s work, as work imposed upon us, which we never invented, which has never been paid for, in which they have forced us to cope with absurd hours, 12 and 13 a day, in order to force us to stay at home.

We must get out of the house; we must reject the home, because we want to unite with other women, to struggle against all situations which presume that women will stay at home, to link ourselves to the struggles of all those who are in ghettos, whether the ghetto is a nursery, a school, a hospital, an old-age home, or asylum. To abandon the home is already a form of struggle, since the social services we perform there would then cease to be carried out in those conditions, and so all those who work out of the home would then demand that the burden carried by us until now be thrown squarely where it belongs – onto the shoulders of capital. This alteration in the terms of struggle will be all the more violent the more the refusal of domestic labor on the part of women will be violent, determined and on a mass scale.

The working class family is the more difficult point to break because it is the support of the worker, but as worker, and for that reason the support of capital. On this family depends the support of the class, the survival of the class – but *at the woman’s expense against the class itself. The woman is the slave of a wage-slave, and her slavery ensures the slavery of her man. Like the trade union, the family protects the worker, but also ensures that he and she will never be anything but workers. And that is why the struggle of the woman of the working class against the family is crucial.*

To meet other women who work inside and outside their homes allows us to possess other chances of struggle. To the extent that our struggle is a struggle against work, it is inscribed in the struggle which the working class wages against capitalist work. But to the extent that the exploitation of women through domestic work has had its own specific history, tied to the survival of the nuclear family, the specific course of this struggle which must pass through the destruction of the nuclear family as established by the capitalist social order, adds a new dimension to the class struggle.

B. The Productivity Of Passivity

However, the woman's role in the family is not only that of hidden supplier of social services who does not receive a wage. As we said at the beginning, to imprison women in purely complementary functions and subordinate them to men within the nuclear family has as its premise the stunting of their physical integrity. In Italy, with the successful help of the Catholic Church which has always defined her as an inferior being, a woman is compelled before marriage into sexual abstinence and after marriage into a repressed sexuality destined only to bear children, obliging her to bear children. It has created a female image of "heroic mother and happy wife" whose sexual identity is pure sublimation, whose function is essentially that of receptacle for other people's emotional expression, who is the cushion of the familial antagonism. What has been defined, then, as female frigidity has to be redefined as an imposed passive receptivity in the sexual function as well.

Now this passivity of the woman in the family is itself "productive". Firstly it makes her the outlet for all the oppressions that men suffer in the world outside the home and at the same time the object on whom the man can exercise a hunger for power that the domination of the capitalist organization of work implants. In this sense, the woman becomes productive for capitalist organization; she acts as a safety valve for the social tensions caused by it. Secondly, the woman becomes productive inasmuch as the complete denial of her personal autonomy forces her to sublimate her frustration in a series of continuous needs that are always centered in the home, a kind of consumption which is the exact parallel of her compulsive perfectionism in her housework. Clearly, it is not our job to tell women what they should have in their homes. Nobody can define the needs of others. Our interest is to organize the struggle through which this sublimation will be unnecessary.

Dead labor and the agony of sexuality

We use the word "sublimation" advisedly. The frustrations of monotonous and trivial chores and of sexual passivity are only separable in words. Sexual creativity and creativity in labor are both areas where human need demands we give free scope to our 'interplaying natural and acquired activities'. For women (and therefore for men) natural and acquired powers are repressed simultaneously. The passive sexual receptivity of women creates compulsively tidy housewife and can make a monotonous assembly line therapeutic. The trivia of most of housework and discipline which is required to perform the same work over every day, every week, every year, double on holidays, destroys the possibilities of uninhibited sexuality. Our childhood is a preparation for martyrdom: we are taught to derive happiness from clean sex on whiter than white sheets; to sacrifice sexuality and other creative activity at one and the same time.

So far the women's movement, most notably by destroying the myth of the vaginal orgasm, has exposed the physical mechanism which allowed women's sexual potential to be strictly defined and limited by men. Now we can begin to reintegrate sexuality with other aspects of creativity, to see how sexuality will always be constrained unless the work we do does not mutilate us and our individual capacities, and unless the persons with whom we have sexual relations are not our masters and are not also mutilated by their work. To explode the vaginal myth is to demand female autonomy as opposed to subordination and sublimation. But it is not only the clitoris versus the vagina. It is both versus the uterus. Either the vagina is primarily the passage to the reproduction of labor power sold as a commodity, the capitalist function of the uterus, or it is part of our natural powers, our social equipment. Sexuality after all is the most social of expressions, the deepest human communication. It is in that sense the dissolution of autonomy. The working class organizes as a class to transcend itself as a class; within that class we organize autonomously to create the basis

to transcend autonomy.

The “political” attack against women

But while we are finding our way of being and of organizing ourselves in struggle, we discover we are confronted by those who are only too eager to attack women, even as we form a movement. In defending herself against obliteration, through work and through consumption, they say, the woman is responsible for the lack of unity of the class. Let us make a partial list of the sins of which she stands accused. They say:

1. She wants more of her husband’s wage to buy for example clothes for herself and her children, not based on what he thinks she needs but on what she thinks she and her children should have. He works hard for the money. She only demands another kind of distribution of their lack of wealth, rather than assisting his struggle for more wealth, more wages.

2. She is in rivalry with other women to be more attractive than they, to have more things than they do, and to have a cleaner and tidier house than her neighbors’. She doesn’t ally with them as she should on a class basis.

3. She buries herself in her home and refuses to understand the struggle other husband on the production line. She may even complain when he goes out on strike rather than backing him up. She votes Conservative.

These are some of the reasons given by those who consider her reactionary or at best backward, even by men who take leading roles in factory struggles and who seem most able to understand the nature of the social boss because of their militant action. It comes easy to them to condemn women for what they consider to be backwardness because that is the prevailing ideology of the society. They do not add that they have benefitted from women’s subordinate position by being waited on hand and foot from the moment of their birth. Some do not even know that they have been waited on, so natural is it to them for mothers and sisters and daughters to serve “their” men. It is very difficult for us, on the other hand, to separate inbred male supremacy from men’s attack, which appears to be strictly “political”, launched only for the benefit of the class.

Let us look at the matter more closely.

1. Women as consumers

Women do not make the home the center of consumption. The process of consumption is integral to the production of labor and if women refused to do the shopping (that is, to spend) this would be strike action. Having said that, however, we must add that those social relationships which women are denied because they are cut off from socially organized labor, they often try to compensate for by buying things. Whether it is adjudged trivial depends on the viewpoint and sex of the judge. Intellectuals buy books, but no one calls this consumption trivial. Independent of the validity of the contents, the book in this society still represents, through a tradition older than capitalism, a male value.

We have already said that women buy things for their home because that home is the only proof that they exist. But the idea that frugal consumption is in any way a liberation is as old as capitalism, and comes from the capitalists who always blame the worker’s situation on the worker. For years Harlem was told by head-shaking liberals that if Black men would only stop driving Cadillacs (until the finance company took them back), the problem of color would be solved. Until the violence of the struggle – the only fitting reply – provided a measure of social power, that Cadillac

was one of the few ways to display the potential for power. *This* and not “practical economics” caused the liberals pain.

In my case, nothing any of us buys would we need if we were free. Not the food they poison for us, nor the clothes that identify us by class, sex and generation, nor the houses in which they imprison us. In any case, too, our problem is that we never have enough, not that we have too much. And that pressure which women place on men is *a defense of the wage*, not an attack. Precisely because women are the slaves of wage slaves, men divide the wage between themselves and the general family expense. If women did not make demands, the general family standard of living would drop to absorb the inflation – the woman of course is the first to do without. Thus unless the woman makes demands, the family is functional to capital in an additional sense to the ones we have listed: it can absorb the fall in the price of labor power. This, therefore, is the most ongoing material way in which women can defend the living standards of the class. And when they go out to political meetings, they will need even more money!

2. Women as rivals

As for women’s “rivalry”, Frantz Fanon has clarified for the Third World what only racism prevents from being generally applied to the class. The colonized, he says, when they do not organize against their oppressors, attack each other. The woman’s pressure for greater consumption may at times express itself in the form of rivalry, but nevertheless as we have said protects the living standards of the class. Which is unlike women’s sexual rivalry; that rivalry is rooted in their economic and social dependence on men. To the degree that they live for men, dress for men, work for men, they are manipulated by men through this rivalry.

As for rivalry about their homes, women are trained from birth to be obsessive and possessive about clean and tidy homes. But men cannot have it both ways; they cannot continue to enjoy the privilege of having a private servant and then complain about the effects of privatization. If they continue to complain, we must conclude that their attack on us for rivalry is really an apology for our servitude. If Fanon was not right, that the strife among the colonized is an expression of their low level of organization, then the antagonism is a sign of natural incapacity. When we call a home a ghetto, we could call it a colony governed by indirect rule and be as accurate. The resolution of the antagonism of the colonized to each other lies in autonomous struggle. Women have overcome greater obstacles than rivalry to unite in supporting men in struggles. Where women have been less successful is in transforming and deepening moments of struggle by making of them opportunities to raise their own demands. Autonomous struggle turns the question on its head: not “will women unite to support men”, but “will men unite to support women”.

3. Women as divisive

What has prevented previous political intervention by women? Why can they be used in certain circumstances against strikes? Why, in other words, is the class not united? From the beginning of this document we have made central the exclusion of women from socialized production.

That is an objective character of capitalist organization: co-operative labor in the factory and isolated labor in the home. This is mirrored subjectively by way workers in industry organize separately from the community. What is the community to do? What are women to do? Support, be appendages to men in the home *and* in the struggle, even form a women’s auxiliary to unions. This division, and *this kind of division* is the history of the class. At every stage of the struggle the most peripheral to the productive cycle are used against those at the center, so long as the latter

ignore the former. This is the history of trade unions, for example, in the United States, when Black workers were used as strikebreakers – never by the way, as often as white workers were led to believe. Blacks like women are immediately identifiable and reports of strikebreaking reinforce prejudices which arise from objective divisions: the white on the assembly line, the Black sweeping round his feet; or the man on the assembly line, the woman sweeping round his feet when he gets home.

Men when they reject work consider themselves militant, and when we reject our work, these same men consider us nagging wives. When some of us vote Conservative because we have been excluded from political struggle, they think we are backward, while they have voted for parties which didn't even consider that we existed as anything but ballast, and in the process sold them (and us all) down the river.

C. The Productivity Of Discipline

The third aspect of women's role in the family is that, because of the special brand of stunting of the personality already discussed, the woman becomes a repressive figure, disciplinarian of all the members of the family, ideologically and psychologically. She may live under the tyranny of her husband, of her home, the tyranny of striving to be "heroic mother and happy wife" when her whole existence repudiates this ideal. Those who are tyrannized and lack power are with the new generation for the first years of their lives producing docile workers and little tyrants, in the same way the teacher does at school. (In this the Woman is joined by her husband: not by chance do parent-teacher associations exist.) Women, responsible for the reproduction of labor power, on the one hand discipline the children who will be workers tomorrow and on the other hand discipline the husband to work today, for only his wage can pay for labor power to be reproduced.

Here we have only attempted to consider female domestic productivity without going into detail about the psychological implications. At least we have located and essentially outlined this female domestic productivity as it passes through the complexities of the role that the woman plays (in addition, that is, to the actual domestic work the burden of which she assumes without pay). We pose, then, as foremost the need to break this role that wants women divided from each other, from men and from children, each locked in her family as the chrysalis in the cocoon that imprisons itself by its own work, to die and leave silk for capital. To reject all this, as we have already said, means for housewives to recognize themselves also as a section of the class, the most degraded because they are not paid a wage.

The housewife's position in the overall struggle of women is crucial, since it undermines the very pillar supporting the capitalist organization of work, namely the family.

So every goal that tends to affirm the individuality of women against this figure complementary to everything and everybody, that is, the housewife, is worth posing as a goal subversive to the continuation, the productivity of this role.

In this same sense all the demands that can serve to restore to the woman the integrity of her basic physical functions, starting with the sexual one which was the first to be robbed along with productive creativity, have to be posed with the greatest urgency.

It is not by chance that research in birth control has developed so slowly, that abortion is forbidden almost the world over or conceded finally only for "therapeutic" reasons.

To move first on these demands is not facile reformism. Capitalist management of these matters poses over and over discrimination of class and discrimination of women specifically.

Why were proletarian women, Third World women, used as guinea pigs in this research? Why

does the question of birth control continue to be posed as women's problem? To begin to struggle to overthrow the capitalist management over these matters is to move on a class basis, and on a specifically female basis. To link these struggles with the struggle against motherhood conceived as the responsibility of women exclusively, against domestic work conceived as women's work, ultimately against the models that capitalism offers us as examples of women's emancipation which are nothing more than ugly copies of the male role, is to struggle against the division and organization of labor.

Women and the struggle not to work

Let us sum up. The role of housewife, behind whose isolation is hidden social labor, must be destroyed. But our alternatives are strictly defined. Up to now, the myth of female incapacity, rooted in this isolated woman dependent on someone else's wage and therefore shaped by someone else's consciousness, has been broken by only one action: the woman getting her own wage, breaking the back of personal economic dependence, making her own independent experience with the world outside the home, performing social labor in a socialized structure, whether the factory or the office, and initiating there her own forms of social rebellion along with the traditional forms of the class. *The advent of the women's movement is a rejection of this alternative.*

Capital itself is seizing upon the same impetus which created a movement – the rejection by millions of women of women's traditional place – to recompose the work force with increasing numbers of women. The movement can only develop in opposition to this. It poses by its very existence and must pose with increasing articulation in action that women refuse the myth of liberation through work.

For we have worked enough. We have chopped billions of tons of cotton, washed billions of dishes, scrubbed billions of floors, typed billions of words, wired billions of radio sets, washed billions of nappies, by hand and in machines. Every time they have "let us in" to some traditionally male enclave, it was to find for us a new level of exploitation. Here again we must make a parallel, different as they are, between underdevelopment in the Third World and underdevelopment in the metropolis – to be more precise, in the kitchens of the metropolis. Capitalist planning proposes to the Third World that it "develop"; that in addition to its present agonies, it too suffer the agony of an industrial counter revolution. Women in the metropolis have been offered the same "aid". But those of us who have gone out of our homes to work because we had to or for extras or for economic independence have warned the rest: inflation has riveted us to this bloody typing pool or to this assembly line, and in that there is no salvation. We must refuse the development they are offering us. But the struggle of the working woman is not to return to the isolation of the home, appealing as this sometimes may be on Monday morning; any more than the housewife's struggle is to exchange being imprisoned in a house for being clinched to desks or machines, appealing as this sometimes may be compared to the loneliness of the 12th story flat.

Women must completely discover their own possibilities – which are neither mending socks nor becoming captains of ocean-going ships. Better still, we *may* wish to do these things, but these now cannot be located anywhere but in the history of capital.

The challenge to the women's movement is to find modes of struggle which, while they liberate women from the home, at the same time avoid on the one hand a double slavery and on the other prevent another degree of capitalistic control and regimentation. *This ultimately is the dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics within the women's movement.*

It seems that there have been few women of genius. There could not be since, cut off from

the social process, we cannot see on what matters they could exercise their genius. Now there is a matter, the struggle itself.

Freud said also that every woman from birth suffers from penis envy. He forgot to add that this feeling of envy begins from the moment when she perceives that in some way to have a penis means to have power. Even less did he realize that the traditional power of the penis commenced upon a whole new history at the very moment when the separation of man from woman became a capitalistic division.

And this is where our struggle begins.

12.2 Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (1974)

They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.

They call it frigidity. We call it absenteeism.

Every miscarriage is a work accident.

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are both working conditions, but homosexuality is workers' control of production, not the end of work.

More smiles? More money. Nothing will be so powerful in destroying the healing virtues of a smile.

Neuroses, suicides, desexualization: occupational diseases of the housewife.

Many times the difficulties and ambiguities which women express in discussing wages for housework stem from the reduction of wages for housework to a thing, a lump of money, instead of viewing it as a political perspective. The difference between these two standpoints is enormous. To view wages for housework as a thing rather than a perspective is to detach the end result of our struggle from the struggle itself and to miss its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in capitalist society.

When we view wages for housework in this reductive way we start asking ourselves: what difference could some more money make to our lives? We might even agree that for a lot of women who do not have any choice except for housework and marriage, it would indeed make a lot of difference. But for those of us who seem to have other choices – professional work, enlightened husband, communal way of life, gay relations or a combination of these – it would not make much of a difference at all. For us there are supposedly other ways of achieving economic independence, and the last thing we want is to get it by identifying ourselves as housewives, a fate which we all agree is, so to speak, worse than death. The problem with this position is that in our imagination we usually add a bit of money to the shitty lives we have now and then ask, “so what?” on the false premise that we could ever get that money without at the same time revolutionising – in the process of struggling for it – all our family and social relations. But if we take wages for housework as a political perspective, we can see that struggling for it is going to produce a revolution in our lives and in our social power as women. It is also clear that if we think we do not “need” that money, it is because we have accepted the particular forms of prostitution of body and mind by which we get the money to hide that need. As I will try to show, not only is wages for housework a revolutionary perspective, but it is the only revolutionary perspective from a feminist viewpoint and ultimately for the entire working class.

A Labour of Love

It is important to recognise that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class. True, under capitalism every worker is manipulated and exploited and his/her relation to capital is totally mystified. The wage gives the impression of a fair deal: you work and you get paid, hence you and your boss are equal; while in reality the wage, rather than paying for the work you do, hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit. But the wage at least recognizes that you are a worker, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work. To have a wage means to be part of a social contract, and there is no doubt concerning its meaning: you work, not because you like it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live. But exploited as you might be, you are not that work. Today you are a postman, tomorrow a cabdriver. All that matters is how much of that work you have to do and how much of that money you can get.

But in the case of housework the situation is qualitatively different. The difference lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework had to be transformed into a natural attribute rather than be recognised as a social contract because from the beginning of capital's scheme for women this work was destined to be unwaged. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable and even fulfilling activity to make us accept our unwaged work. In its turn, the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that *housework is not work*, thus preventing women from struggling against it, except in the privatized kitchen-bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to ridicule, thereby further reducing the protagonist of a struggle. We are seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle.

Yet just how natural it is to be a housewife is shown by the fact that it takes at least twenty years of socialization – day-to-day training, performed by an unwaged mother – to prepare a woman for this role, to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life. Even so, it hardly succeeds. No matter how well-trained we are, few are the women who do not feel cheated when the bride's day is over and they find themselves in front of a dirty sink. Many of us still have the illusion that we marry for love. A lot of us recognise that we marry for money and security; but it is time to make it clear that while the love or money involved is very little, the work which awaits us is enormous. This is why older women always tell us "Enjoy your freedom while you can, buy whatever you want now." But unfortunately it is almost impossible to enjoy any freedom if from the earliest days of life you are trained to be docile, subservient, dependent and most important to sacrifice yourself and even to get pleasure from it. If you don't like it, it is your problem, your failure, your guilt, your abnormality.

We must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expense of women. By denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone. First of all, it has got a hell of a lot of work almost for free, and it has made sure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life (the magic words: "Yes, darling, you are a real woman"). At the same time, it has disciplined the male worker also, by making his woman dependent on his work and his wage, and trapped him in this discipline by giving him a servant after he himself has done so much serving at the factory or the office. In fact, our role as women is to be the unwaged but happy, and most of all loving, servants of the "working class", i.e. those strata of the proletariat

to which capital was forced to grant more social power. In the same way as god created Eve to give pleasure to Adam, so did capital create the housewife to service the male worker physically, emotionally and sexually – to raise his children, mend his socks, patch up his ego when it is crushed by the work and the social relations (which are relations of loneliness) that capital has reserved for him. It is precisely this peculiar combination of physical, emotional and sexual services that are involved in the role women must perform for capital that creates the specific character of that servant which is the housewife, that makes her work so burdensome and at the same time invisible. It is not an accident that most men start thinking of getting married as soon as they get their first job. This is not only because now they can afford it, but because having somebody at home who takes care of you is the only condition not to go crazy after a day spent on an assembly line or at a desk. Every woman knows that this is what she should be doing to be a true woman and have a “successful” marriage. And in this case too, the poorer the family the higher the enslavement of the woman, and not simply because of the monetary situation. In fact capital has a dual policy, one for the middle class and one for the proletarian family. It is no accident that we find the most unsophisticated machismo in the working class family: the more blows the man gets at work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expense. You beat your wife and vent your rage against her when you are frustrated or overtired by your work or when you are defeated in a struggle (to go into a factory is itself a defeat). The more the man serves and is bossed around, the more he bosses around. A man’s home is his castle – and his wife has to learn to wait in silence when he is moody, to put him back together when he is broken down and swears at the world, to turn around in bed when he says “I’m too tired tonight,” or when he goes so fast at lovemaking that, as one woman put it, he might as well make it with a mayonnaise jar. (Women have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatised way. The problem, then, becomes how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and bedroom and into the streets.)

This fraud that goes under the name of love and marriage affects all of us, even if we are not married, because once housework was totally naturalised and sexualised, once it became a feminine attribute, all of us as females are characterised by it. If it is natural to do certain things, then all women are expected to do them and even like doing them – even those women who, due to their social position, could escape some of that work or most of it (their husbands can afford maids and shrinks and other forms of relaxation and amusement). We might not serve one man, but we are all in a servant relation with respect to the whole male world. This is why to be called a female is such a putdown, such a degrading thing. (“Smile, honey, what’s the matter with you?” is something every man feels entitled to ask you, whether he is your husband, or the man who takes your ticket, or your boss at work.)

The revolutionary perspective

If we start from this analysis we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand for wages for housework. It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.

To ask for wages for housework will by itself undermine the expectations society has of us, since these expectations – the essence of our socialisation – are all functional to our wageless condition in the home.

In this sense, it is absurd to compare the struggle of women for wages to the struggle of male

workers in the factory for more wages. The waged worker in struggling for more wages challenges his social role but remains within it. When we struggle for wages we struggle unambiguously and directly against our social role. In the same way there is a qualitative difference between the struggles of the waged worker and the struggles of the slave for a wage against that slavery. It should be clear, however, that when we struggle for a wage we do not struggle to enter capitalist relations, because we have never been out of them. We struggle to break capital's plan for women, which is an essential moment of that planned division of labour and social power within the working class, through which capital has been able to maintain its power. Wages for housework, then, is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it attacks capital and forces it to restructure social relations in terms more favourable to us and consequently more favourable to the unity of the class. In fact, to demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the opposite. To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity.

Against any accusation of "economism" we should remember that money is capital, i.e. it is the power to command labour. Therefore to reappropriate that money which is the fruit of our labour – of our mothers' and grandmothers' labour – means at the same time to undermine capital's power to command forced labour from us. And we should not distrust the power of the wage in demystifying our femaleness and making visible our work – our femaleness as work – since the lack of a wage has been so powerful in shaping this role and hiding our work. To demand wages for housework is to make it visible that our minds, bodies and emotions have all been distorted for a specific function, in a specific function, and then have been thrown back at us as a model to which we should all conform if we want to be accepted as women in this society.

To say that we want wages for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital, that capital has made and makes money out of our cooking, smiling, fucking. At the same time, it shows that we have cooked, smiled, fucked throughout the years not because it was easier for us than for anybody else, but because we did not have any other choice. Our faces have become distorted from so much smiling, our feelings have got lost from so much loving, our oversexualisation has left us completely desexualised.

Wages for housework is only the beginning, but its message is clear: from now on they have to pay us because as females we do not guarantee anything any longer. We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality which we have never known. And from the viewpoint of work we can ask not one wage but many wages, because we have been forced into many jobs at once. We are housemaids, prostitutes, nurses, shrinks; this is the essence of the "heroic" spouse who is celebrated on "Mother's Day". We say: stop celebrating our exploitation, our supposed heroism. From now on we want money for each moment of it, so that we can refuse some of it and eventually all of it. In this respect nothing can be more effective than to show that our female virtues have a calculable money value, until today only for capital, increased in the measure that we were defeated; from now on against capital *for us* in the measure we organise our power.

The struggle for social services

This is the most radical perspective we can adopt because although we can ask for everything, day care, equal pay, free laundromats, we will never achieve any real change unless we attack our female

role at its roots. Our struggle for social services, i.e. for better working conditions, will always be frustrated if we do not first establish that our work is work. Unless we struggle against the totality of it we will never achieve victories with respect to any of its moments. We will fail in the struggle for the free laundromats unless we first struggle against the fact that we cannot love except at the price of endless work, which day after day cripples our bodies, our sexuality, our social relations, unless we first escape the blackmail whereby our need to give and receive affection is turned against us as a work duty for which we constantly feel resentful against our husbands, children and friends, and guilty for that resentment. Getting a second job does not change that role, as years and years of female work outside the house still witness. The second job not only increases our exploitation, but simply reproduces our role in different forms. Wherever we turn we can see that the jobs women perform are mere extensions of the housewife condition in all its implications. That is, not only do we become nurses, maids, teachers, secretaries – all functions for which we are well-trained in the home – but we are in the same bind that hinders our struggles in the home: isolation, the fact that other people's lives depend on us, or the impossibility to see where our work begins and ends, where our work ends and our desires begin. Is bringing coffee to your boss and chatting with him about his marital problems secretarial work or is it a personal favour? Is the fact that we have to worry about our looks on the job a condition of work or is it the result of female vanity? (Until recently airline stewardesses in the United States were periodically weighed and had to be constantly on a diet – a torture that all women know – for fear of being laid off.) As is often said – when the needs of the waged labour market require her presence there – “A woman can do any job without losing her femininity,” which simply means that no matter what you do you are still a cunt.

As for the proposal of socialisation and collectivisation of housework, a couple of examples will be sufficient to draw a line between these alternatives and our perspective. It is one thing to set up a day care centre the way we want it, and demand that the State pay for it. It is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and ask the State to control them, discipline them, teach them to honour the American flag not for five hours, but for fifteen or twenty-four hours. It is one thing to organise communally the way we want to eat (by ourselves, in groups, etc.) and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organise our meals. In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the State's control over us.

The struggle against housework

Some women say: how is wages for housework going to change the attitudes of our husbands towards us? Won't our husbands still expect the same duties as before and even more than before once we are paid for them? But these women do not see that they can expect so much from us precisely because we are not paid for our work, because they assume that it is “a woman's thing” which does not cost us much effort. Men are able to accept our services and take pleasure in them because they presume that housework is easy for us, that we enjoy it because we do it for their love. They actually expect us to be grateful because by marrying us or living with us they have given us the opportunity to express ourselves as women (i.e. to serve them), “You are lucky you have found a man like me”. Only when men see our work as work – our love as work – and most important our determination to refuse both, will they change their attitude towards us. When hundreds and thousands of women are in the streets saying that endless cleaning, being always emotionally available, fucking at command for fear of losing our jobs is hard, hated work which wastes our lives, then they will be scared and feel undermined as men.

But this is the best thing that can happen from their own point of view, because by exposing

the way capital has kept us divided (capital has disciplined them through us and us through them – each other, against each other), we – their crutches, their slaves, their chains – open the process of their liberation. In this sense wages for housework will be much more educational than trying to prove that we can work as well as them, that we can do the same jobs. We leave this worthwhile effort to the “career woman”, the woman who escapes from her oppression not through the power of unity and struggle, but through the power of the master, the power to oppress – usually other women. And we don’t have to prove that we can “break the blue collar barrier”. A lot of us broke that barrier a long time ago and have discovered that the overalls did not give us more power than the apron; if possible even less, because now we had to wear both and had less time and energy to struggle against them. *The things we have to prove are our capacity to expose what we are already doing, what capital is doing to us and our power in the struggle against it.*

Unfortunately, many women – particularly single women – are afraid of the perspective of wages for housework because they are afraid of identifying even for a second with the housewife. They know that this is the most powerless position in society and so they do not want to realise that they are housewives too. This is precisely their weakness, a weakness which is maintained and perpetuated through the lack of self-identification.

We want and have to say that we are all housewives, we are all prostitutes and we are all gay, because until we recognise our slavery we cannot recognise our struggle against it, because as long as we think we are something better, something different than a housewife, we accept the logic of the master, which is a logic of division, and for us the logic of slavery. We are all housewives because no matter where we are they can always count on more work from us, more fear on our side to put forward our demands, and less pressure on them for money, since hopefully our minds are directed elsewhere, to that man in our present or our future who will “take care of us”.

And we also delude ourselves that we can escape housework. But how many of us, in spite of working outside the house, have escaped it? And can we really so easily disregard the idea of living with a man? What if we lose our jobs? What about ageing and losing even the minimal amount of power that youth (productivity) and attractiveness (female productivity) afford us today? And what about children? Will we ever regret having chosen not to have them, not even having been able to realistically ask that question? And can we afford gay relations? Are we willing to pay the possible price of isolation and exclusion? But can we really afford relations with men?

The question is: why are these our only alternatives and what kind of struggle will move us beyond them?

Week 13

Italy's Creeping May (1968-77)

Operaismo (“Workerism”) and autonomism were two strains of Left political thought developed in Italy in the second half of the twentieth century. The readings for this week come out of this milieu.

This week's readings are Mario Tronti's *Lenin In England* and *The Strategy of the Refusal* as well as Silvia Federici and Mario Montano's *Theses on the Mass Worker and Social Capital*. Sergio Bologna's *The Tribe of Moles* provides a history of this period.

There is no Eley chapter this week.

13.1 Mario Tronti, Lenin In England (1964)

A new era in the class struggle is beginning. The workers have imposed it on the capitalists, through the violent reality of their organised strength in the factories. Capital's power appears to be stable and solid. ... the balance of forces appears to be weighted against the workers... and yet precisely at the points where capital's power appears most dominant, we see how deeply it is penetrated by this menace, this threat of the working class.

It is easy *not* to see it. We shall need to study, to look long and hard at the class situation of the working class. Capitalist society has its laws of development: economists have invented them, governments have imposed them, and workers have suffered them. But who will uncover the laws of development of the working class? Capital has its history, and its historians write it – but who is going to write the history of the working class? Capitalist exploitation can impose its political domination through a hundred and one different forms – but how are we going to sort out the form that will be taken by the future dictatorship of the workers organised as the ruling class? This is explosive material; it is intensely social; we must live it, work from within it, and work patiently.

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned.

This is not a rhetorical proposition. Nor is it intended just to restore our confidence. Of course, we urgently need to shake off that sense of working class defeat which has for decades dragged down this movement which, in its origins, was the only revolutionary movement of this era. But an urgent

practical need is never sufficient basis for a scientific thesis: such a thesis must stand on its own feet, on a solid and complex grounding of material, historical fact. At that point, our case will be proven: in June 1848 (that fateful month, a thousand times cursed by the bourgeoisie), and possibly even earlier, the working class took over the stage, and they have never left it since. In different periods they have voluntarily taken on different roles – as actors, as prompters, as technicians or stage-hands – whilst all the time waiting to wade into the theatre and attack the audience. So how does the working class present itself today, on the contemporary stage?

Our new approach starts from the proposition that, at both national and international level, it is the specific, present, political situation of the working class that both necessitates and directs the given forms of capital's development. From this beginning we must now move forward to a new understanding of the entire world network of social relations.

For instance take the basic material feature of this network – the fact that the world market has been undergoing reconstruction – a process which we can trace back to the ending of Stalinism's stranglehold over development. It would be easy to explain this in terms that are economic, addressing ourselves to "the problem of markets in capitalist production." But the *working class viewpoint* seeks to find a political explanation. The meaning of a unified world market *today* is that it brings an *international* level of control of social labour power. It is possible – albeit difficult – to organise commodity production within a limited free-trade zone. But not so the movements of the working class. Historically, right at its origins, workers' labour power was already homogeneous at the international level, and – in the course of a long historical period – it has forced capital to become equally homogeneous. And today it is precisely the *unity of movement* of the working class at the world level which forces capital rapidly to salvage a unified response.

But when we say that there is a unity in the movements of the international working class – how are we to grasp it? The various institutional levels of the official labour movement only create *divisions* in everything; the structures of capitalism unify everything – but only in capital's interests. An act of political struggle can't be simply tested and measured by empirical means. The only way to prove this unity is to start organising it. Then we shall discover that the new forms of class unity is wholly implicit in the new forms of working class struggle, and that the field of this struggle is *social capital at an international level*.

At this level, the political situation of the working class has never been so clear: wherever in history we find concentrated the social mass of an industrial labour force, we can see at a glance the same collective attitudes, the same basic practices, and the same unified political growth. Planned non-cooperation, organised passivity, polemical expectations, a political refusal, and a permanent continuity of struggles – these are the specific historical forms in which working class struggle today is generalising and developing itself. They are transitory forms of a transitory situation, in which, in social terms, the workers have already gone beyond the old organisations, but have not yet reached a new organisation a vacuum of political organisation, be it reformist or revolutionary. We have reached a period of in-between in working class history: we must examine it deeply and grasp its implications, for its political consequences will be decisive.

The first consequence is, not surprisingly, a difficulty: how are we to grasp the material movements of the class, in the absence of levels of institutions corresponding to those movements – i.e. the lack of those channels through which class consciousness usually expresses itself? This clearly demands a greater theoretical effort (and one more capable of making abstractions), but it also has a clearer practical function: for we are compelled to analyse the working class independently of the working class movement.

The second consequence is that we find contradictions and seeming uncertainties in the move-

ments of the class. It is clear that if the working class had a revolutionary political organisation, it would aim everywhere, at making use of the highest developed point of capitalist reformism. The process of building a unification of capital at the international level can only become the material base for a political recomposition of the working class (and in this sense a positive strategic moment for the revolution) if it is accompanied by a revolutionary growth not only of the class, but also of class organisation. If this element is absent, the whole process works to the advantage of capital, as a tactical moment of a one-sided stabilisation of the system, seemingly integrating the working class within the system.

The historical workings of Italian capitalism – i.e. the organic political accord between Catholics and Socialists – could perhaps reopen a revolutionary process along classical lines, if it again managed to provide Italian workers with a working class party which would be committed to direct opposition to the capitalist system in the democratic phase of capital's class dictatorship. Without this, the dominance of capitalist exploitation will, for the time being, become more stable, and the workers will be forced to seek other paths towards their revolution. Whilst it is true that the working class objectively forces capital into clear, precise choices, it is also true that capital then makes these choices work against the working class. Capital, at this moment, is better organised than the working class: the choices that the working class imposes on capital run the risk of giving strength to capital. This gives the working class an *immediate interest* in opposing these choices.

Today the strategic viewpoint of the working class is so clear that we wonder whether it is only now coming to the full richness of its maturity. It has discovered (or rediscovered) the true secret, which will be the death sentence on its class enemy: the political ability to force capital into reformism, and then to blatantly make use of that reformism for the working class revolution. But the present tactical position of the working class – as a class without class organisation – is, and must necessarily be, less clear and more subtly ambiguous. The working class is still forced to make use of contradictions which create crisis within capitalist reformism; it has to play up the elements which hinder and retard capitalist development, since it knows and senses that to allow a free hand for capital's reformist operations in the absence of a political organisation of the working class, would amount to freezing for a long period the entire revolutionary process (and, by the same token, if such an organisation *did* exist, it would open this process immediately). Thus the two reformisms – that of capital and that of the labour movement – should certainly meet, but only through a direct initiative by the working class. When – as at the present moment – all the initiative is in capital's hands, the workers' immediate interest is to keep them apart. From a tactical point of view, too, it is correct that this meeting should take place once the working class has experienced not only struggle, but also revolutionary struggle, and within revolutionary struggle has also experienced alternative models of organisation. At that point, the historic encounter of capitalist reformism with the reformism of the labour movement will really mark the beginning of the revolutionary process. But our present situation is different: it precedes and paves the way for that later stage. From this follows both the workers strategic support for capital's development in *general* and their tactical opposition to the particular forms of that development. So, in the working class today there is a contradiction between tactics and strategy.

In other words, the political moment of *tactics* and the theoretical moment of *strategy* are in contradiction, in a complex and very much mediated relationship between revolutionary organisation and working class science. Today, at the theoretical level, the workers viewpoint must be unrestricted, it must not limit itself, it must leap forward by transcending and negating all the empirical evidence which the intellectual cowardice of the petty-bourgeois is forever demanding. For working class thought, the moment of discovery has returned. The days of systems building, of

repetition, and vulgarity elevated to the status of systematic discourse are definitely over. What is needed now is to start again, with rigorously one-sided class logic – courage and determination for ourselves, and detached irony towards the rest.

This is not to be confused with the creation of a political programme; we must resist the temptation to carry this theoretical out-look immediately into the arena of the political struggle – a struggle which is articulated on the basis of a precise content, which, in some cases, may even contradict (quite correctly) our theoretical statements. As regards the practical resolution of practical problems of direct struggles, of direct organisation of direct intervention in a given class situation where workers are involved – all these should be gauged first of all by what the movement needs for its own development. Only secondarily should they be judged from the viewpoint of a general perspective which subjectively imposes these things on the class enemy.

But the separation of theory and politics is only the consequence of the contradiction between tactics and strategy. Both have their material base in the process (still slowly developing) by which the class and the historical organisations of the class – the “working class” and the “labour movement” – first become divided, and then come to counterpose each other. What does this mean concretely, and where will it lead us? The first thing to say is that the goal, the aim of this approach is the solid recomposition of a politically correct relationship between the two moments. No separation between them can be theoretically justified, and no counterposition can be effected at any point, not even provisionally. If a part of the labour movement finds again the path to revolution as signalled by the working class, then the process of unification of these moments will be easier, quicker, more direct and more secure. Otherwise, the revolutionary process, although nonetheless assured, will be less clear, less decisive, longer and more full of drama. It is easy to see the job of mystification that the old organisations are doing on the new working class struggles. But it is harder to grasp the way that workers are continuously, consciously making use of that institution which capital still believes to be the movement of the organised workers.

In particular, the working class has left in the hands of the traditional organisations all the problems of tactics, while maintaining for itself an autonomous strategic perspective free from restriction and compromises. And again we have the temporary outcome, of a revolutionary strategy and reformist tactics. Even if, as often happens, the opposite *appears* to be the case. It appears that workers are now in accord with the system, and only occasionally come into friction with it: but this is the “bourgeois” appearance of capitalist social relations. The truth is that, politically speaking, even the unions’ skirmishes represent for the workers an academic exercise in their struggle for power: it is as such that they take them on, make use of them, and once they have been made use of, hand them back to the bosses. As a matter of fact, the classical Marxist thesis – that the Union holds the tactical moment, and the Party holds the strategic moment – still holds true for the workers. This is why, if a link still exists between the working class and the unions, it does not exist between the working class and the Party. It is this fact which frees the strategic perspective from the immediate organisational tasks; it splits, temporarily, class struggle and class organisation; it splits the ongoing moment of struggle and temporary forms of organisation – all of which is the consequence of the historical failure of Socialist reformism, as well as being a premise of the political development of the working class revolution.

Theoretical research and practical political work have to be dragged – violently if need be – into focusing on this question: not the development of capitalism, but the development of the revolution. We have no models. The history of past experiences serves only to free us of those experiences. We must entrust ourselves to a new kind of scientific interpretation. We know that the whole process of development is materially embodied in the new level of working class struggles.

Our starting point might therefore be in uncovering certain forms of working class struggles which set in motion a certain type of capitalist development which goes in the direction of the revolution. Then we would consider how to articulate these experiences within the working class, choosing subjectively the nerve points at which it is possible to strike at capitalist production. And on this basis, testing and re-testing, we could approach the problem of how to create a relationship, a new and ongoing organisation which could match these struggles. Then perhaps we would discover that “organisational miracles” are always happening, and have always been happening, within those miraculous struggles of the working class that nobody wants to know about but which perhaps, all by themselves, make and have made more revolutionary history than all the revolutions the colonised people have ever made.

But this practical work, articulated on the basis of the factory, and then made to function throughout the terrain of the social relations of production, this work needs to be continually judged and mediated by a political level which can generalise it. This is a new kind of political level, which requires us to look into and organise a new form of working class newspaper. This would not be designed to immediately report and reflect on all particular experiences of struggle; rather, its task would be to concentrate these experiences into a general political approach. In this sense, the newspaper would provide a monitoring of the strategic validity of particular instances of struggle. The formal procedure for carrying out such a verification would have to be turned on its head. It is the political approach which must verify the correctness of the particular struggles, and not vice-versa. Because, on this basis, the political approach would be the total viewpoint of the working class, and therefore the actual real situation. And it is easy to see how such an approach takes us, away from the Leninist conception of the working class newspaper: this was conceived as the collective organiser on the basis of, or in anticipation of, a Bolshevik organisation of the class and of the Party. These are impossible objectives for us at this stage of the class struggle: this is the stage where we must embark on a discovery, not of the political organisation of advanced vanguards, but of the political organisation of the whole, compact social mass which the working class has become, in the period of its high political maturity – a class which, precisely because of these characteristics, is the only revolutionary force, a force which, proud and menacing, controls the present order of things.

We know it. And Lenin knew it before us. And before Lenin, Marx also discovered, in his own experience, how the hardest point is the transition to organisation. The continuity of the struggle is a simple matter: the workers only need themselves, and the bosses facing them. But continuity of organisation is a rare and complex thing: no sooner is organisation institutionalised into a form, than it is immediately used by capitalism (or by the labour movement on behalf of capitalism). This explains the fact that workers will very fast drop forms of organisation that they have only just won. And in place of the bureaucratic void of the general political organisation, they substitute the ongoing struggle at factory level – a struggle which takes ever-new forms which only the intellectual creativity of productive work can discover. Unless a directly *working class* political organisation can be generalised, the revolutionary process will not begin: workers know it, and this is why you will not find them in the chapels of the official parties singing hymns to the “democratic” revolution. The reality of the working class is tied firmly to the name of Karl Marx, while the need of the working class for political organisation is tied equally firmly to the name of Lenin. With a masterly stroke, the Leninist strategy brought Marx to St. Petersburg: only the working class viewpoint could have carried out such a bold revolutionary step. Now let us try to retrace the path, with the same scientific spirit of adventure and political discovery. What we call “Lenin in England” is a project to research a new Marxist practice of the working class party: it is the theme of struggle

and of organisation at the highest level of political development of the working class.

13.2 Mario Tronti, *The Strategy of the Refusal* (1965)

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It is true that here we see the working class articulation of capitalist development: at first as an initiative that is positive for the functioning of the system, an initiative that only needs to be organised via institutions; in the second instance, as a “No”, a refusal to manage the mechanism of the society as it stands, merely to improve it – a “No” which is repressed by pure violence. This is the difference of content which can exist – even within one and the same set of working class demands – between trade union demands and political refusal. Social democracy, even when it has conquered State political power, has never gone beyond the limited demands of a trade union facing an employer. The communist movement, in individual, short-lived experiences, has blocked the peaceful development of capitalists initiative with the weapon of the Party-of-non-collaboration. Now, if workers simply had to choose between these two options as part of past history, the choice would be fairly simple. This is not, in fact, the problem. The problem is the price to be paid at the level of theory if we take on board the tradition of struggles of the communist movement. However, This problem cannot be answered without taking into account the short-term practical results that will arise from taking this path. At this point we must guard against the subjective illusion that poses the strategic overthrow proposed here, first as the birth of working class science, and then as the first real possible organisation of the class movement. Instead we must cultivate and recover a specific type of internal development of the working class, a political growth of its struggles, and we must use this as a lever in order to make a leap forwards – without objectivism, without harking back to days gone by, and without having to start from scratch. Once again, the crude proletarian origins of the modern worker need to be grasped and made to function within the present needs of struggle and organisation. We must fight fiercely this current image of a “new working class” which is somehow continually being reborn and renewed by the various technological advances of capital, as if in some scientific production laboratory. At the same time, it is not that we are disowning the rebellious past of the working class – the violence, the insurrections, that succession of “desperate follies”. We should not make the same mistakes as the cold-blooded history scholars, by crying “people’s revolt” every time the masses put up barricades, and then finding the “true” working class struggle only in more recent forms of bargaining with the collective capitalist. Were 1848, 1871 and 1917 working class struggles? Empirically, historically, we could demonstrate that they were not, according to the objectives actually put forward in those events. But try to reconstruct the concept and the political reality of the working class without the June insurgents, without the Communards, and without the Bolsheviks. You will have a lifeless model, an empty form in your hands.

Of course, the working class is not the people. But the working class comes from the people. And this is the elementary reason why anyone – like ourselves – who take up the working class viewpoint, no longer need to “go towards the people”. We ourselves, in fact, come from the people. And just as the working class frees itself politically from the people at the moment when it is no longer posed as a subaltern class, so too working class science breaks with the heritage of bourgeois culture at the moment that it no longer takes the viewpoint of society as a whole, but of that part which wishes to overthrow society. Culture in fact, like the concept of Right, of which Marx speaks, is always bourgeois. In other words, it is always a relation between intellectuals and society, between intellectuals and the people, between intellectuals and class; in this way it is always a mediation

of conflicts and Their resolution in something else. If culture is the reconstruction of the totality of man, the search for his humanity in the world, a vocation to keep united that which is divided – then it is something which is by nature reactionary and should be treated as such. The concept of working class culture as revolutionary culture is as contradictory as the concept of bourgeois revolution. Furthermore, the idea implies that wretched Counter-revolutionary thesis whereby the working class is supposed to re-live the whole experience of the history of the bourgeoisie. The myth that the bourgeoisie had a “progressive” culture, which the working class movement is then supposed to pick up out of the dust where capital has thrown it (along with all its old banners), has carried Marxist theoretical research into the realm of fantasy. But at the same time it has imposed a daily task – that we act to safeguard and develop this official inheritance as the heritage of the whole of humanity as it advances down the road of progress. The situation here is so bad that – as in other cases – it will take a violent, destructive blow to unblock it. Here the critique of ideology must consciously pose itself within the workerist perspective, as a critique of culture. It must work towards a dissolution of all that already exists – a refusal to continue to build on the old foundations. Man, Reason, History, these monstrous divinities will need to be fought and destroyed as if they were the power of the bosses. It is not true that capital has abandoned these ancient gods. It has simply turned then into the religion of the official workers movement: in this way they actively continue to govern the world of men. Meanwhile, the negation of these gods (which could hold a mortal danger for capital) is in fact managed directly by capital itself. Thus anti-humanism, irrationalism, anti-historicism, instead of being practical weapons in the hands of the working class struggle, become cultural products in the hands of capitalist ideologies. In this way, culture – not because of the particular contents that it takes on in a particular period, but precisely through its ongoing form, as culture becomes a mediation of the social relation of capitalism, a function of its continued conservation. “Opposition” culture does not escape this fate either; it merely presents the body of labour movement ideologies dressed in the common clothing of bourgeois culture.

We are not concerned with whether or not in past historical periods it has been possible for the historical figure of the intellectual-on-the-side-of-the-working-class to exist. Because what is decisively not possible is that such a political figure can exist today. The organic intellectuals of the working class have in reality become the only thing that they could be: organic intellectuals of the labour movement. It is the Communist Party, it is the old form of organisation outside of the working class, that needs them. For decades they have assured the relationship between the Party and society without passing through the medium of the factory. And now that the factory is imposing itself, now that capital itself is calling them back into the world of production, they arrive as objective mediators between science and industry: and this is the new form that is being taken by the traditional relationship between intellectuals and the party. Today’s most “organic” intellectual is the one who studies the working class – the one who puts into practice the most diabolical bourgeois science that has ever existed – industrial sociology, the study of the movements of workers on behalf of the capitalist. Here too the whole problem needs rejecting en bloc. We are not speaking of a culture that is “on the side of the working class”, nor of intellectuals under a working class aspect – but no culture and no intellectuals (apart from those serving capital). This is the counterpart of our solution to the other problem: no working class re-enactment of the bourgeois revolution, no working class retracing of the path taken by the bourgeois revolution – rather no revolution, ever, outside of the working class outside of what the class is, and thus outside of what the class is forced to do. A critique of culture means to refuse to be intellectuals. Theory of revolution means direct practice of the class struggle. It is the same relationship as that between ideology and working class science; and as that between these two combined and the moment of

subversive praxis.

We said earlier that the working class point of view cannot be separated from capitalist society. We should add that it cannot be separated from the practical necessities of the class struggle within capitalist society.

What, then, are these necessities? And above all, is a new strategy necessary? If it is necessary, then one of the most urgent tasks in the struggle is to discover it, to assemble it and to elaborate it. At the level of science there is no other task than this to be carried out. Formidable and new powers of the intellect must be organised around this work. Powerful brains must begin to function collectively within this single, exclusive perspective. A new form of antagonism must instill itself in working class science, bending this science towards new ends, and then transcending it in the totally political act of practice. The form we refer to is the form of the struggle of refusal, the form of organisation of the working class "No": the refusal to collaborate actively in capitalist development, the refusal to put forward positively programme of demands. In the working class history of capital, it is possible to discover the germ of these forms of struggle and organisation right from the very start, right from the time that the first proletarians were constituted as a class. But their full development, their real significance, comes much later, and they still exist as a strategy of the future. Their possibilities of functioning materially increase as the working class grows quantitatively, as it becomes more concentrated and unified, as it increasingly develops in quality and becomes internally homogeneous, and as it increasingly succeeds in organising itself around the movements of its own overall power.

These forms, therefore, presuppose a process of accumulation of labour-power, which – unlike the accumulation of capital – has a directly political meaning. It implies the concentration and growth not of an economic category, but of the class relation which underlies it; an accumulation, therefore, of a political power which is immediately alternative, even before it comes to be organised as such through the "great collective means" that are proper to it. The refusal is thus a form of struggle which grows simultaneously with the working class – the working class which is, at one and the same time, both political refusal of capital and production of capital as an economic power. This explains why the political struggle by workers and the terrain of capitalist production always form a whole. The first demands made by proletarians in their own right, the moment that they cannot be absorbed by the capitalist, function objectively as forms of refusal which put the system in jeopardy. Whenever the positive demands of workers go beyond the margins that the capitalists is able to grant, once again they repeat this function – the objective, negative function of pure and simple political blockage in the mechanism of the economic laws. Every conjunctural transition, every advance in the structure, in the economic mechanism, must therefore be studied in terms of its specific moments: but only in order to arrive at the point where the workers can demand that which capital, at that particular moment in time, cannot give. In such circumstances, the demand as a refusal sets off a chain of crises in capitalist production, each of which requires the tactical capacity to make a leap forward in the level of working class organisation.

As, together, both workers and capital grow, there is a gradual process of simplification of the class struggle. The fundamental strategic importance of this must be grasped. It is not true that the "elementary" nature of the first clashes between proletarians and individual capitalists later became enormously complicated as the working masses found themselves faced with the modern initiative of big capital. In fact, precisely the opposite is true. In the beginning, the content of the class struggle has two faces – that of the working class & that of the capitalists – which are not yet separated by a radical division. The struggle for the working day is instructive in this respect. Moreover, the platforms of demands which workers have for decades, presented to the capitalists

have had – and could only have had – one result: the improvement of exploitation. Better conditions of life for the workers were not separable from greater economic development of capitalism. As far as the official working class movement is concerned), both the trade union strand, and later the reformist strand, have functioned within the spiral of this process, in their attempts at economic organisation of the workers. It is no accident that, in our exposition, we have preferred to stress those moments of working class struggle that challenge, even at a less advanced social level, the political power of capital. The fact remains that this historical terrain of the class struggle, which has by no means disappeared from the present-day world, can be reduced to the simplicity of a direct clash between antagonistic forces only through a work of analysing the high points of successive developments and by criticism of the results they achieve. We find this to be a terrain in which the class struggle has always been complicated and mediated in its outward relations by situations, even political situations, which were not in themselves class struggle. In the process of things these situations increasingly lose importance (ie the residues of the pre-capitalist past are burned away) thus causing the downfall of all the future Utopias which have been built on the working class, and this finally offers the subjective possibility of enclosing the class struggle within the chain of the present in order to smash it. In this process we have to grasp from the working-class point of view not only the quantitative growth and massification of the antagonism, not only its ever-increasingly homogeneous internal unification, but also, through this, the way it progressively regains its primitive, direct elementary nature, as a counter-position between two classes, each of which gives life to the other, but only one of which holds in its grasp the possible death of the other. Leaving aside earlier historical periods, and coming forward to the highest point of development, we can see the evident truth of that simplest of revolutionary truths: capital cannot destroy the working class; the working class can destroy capital. The cook who, according to Lenin, should be able to govern the workers State, must be enabled to function – as from now, and on the basis of these elementary categories – as a theoretician of working class science.

Thus the masses of working class demands simplify and unify into one. There must come a point where all will disappear, except one – the demand for power, all power, to the workers, this demand is the highest form of the refusal. It presupposes already a de facto reversal of the balance of domination between the two classes. In other words, it presupposes that from that moment it will be the capitalist class putting positive demands, making their requests, presenting their Bill of Rights (in the name, naturally, of the general interests of society). And it will be the workers who are rejecting the pleas that are put to them. There must also be a point here, where all the requests and demands will come explicitly from the capitalists, and only the “No” will be openly working class. These are not stories of some far-distant future. The tendency is already under way, and we must grasp it from the start in order to control it.

When capital reaches a high level of development it no longer limits itself to guaranteeing collaboration of the workers – i.e. the active extraction of living labour within the dead mechanism of its stabilisation – some-thing which it so badly needs. At significant points it now makes a transition, to the point of expressing its objective needs through the subjective demands of the workers. It is true – and we have seen – that this has already happened, historically. The spectre of capitalist necessities of production being imposed as working class demands, in the struggle, is a recurrent theme in the history of capital, and it can only be explained as a permanent working class articulation of capitalist society. But whereas in the past this happened as an objective functioning of the system (which was thereby virtually self-regulating), today it happens, on the contrary, by conscious initiative of the capitalist class, via the modern instruments of its power apparatus. And in between there has been that decisive experience of working class struggle, which no longer limited

itself to asking for power, but actually conquered it. It was with 1917 and the Russian Revolution that the working class articulation of capital was subjectively imposed on the capitalists. What previously had functioned of itself, controlled by nobody, as a blind economic law, from that moment had to be moved from above, politically promoted by those who held the power: it was the only way to control the objective process, the only way to defeat the subversive threat of its possible consequences. This is the origin of that major development in capital's subjective awareness, which led it to conceive and put into practice a plan of social control over all the moments of its cycle, all conceived within a direct capitalist use of working class articulation. Thus, once again, an experience of working class struggle spurs a major advance in the capitalist point of view – an advance which it would never have made of its own accord. The demands of the working class are henceforth recognised by the capitalist themselves as objective needs of the production of capital: and as such they are not only taken on board, but are actively solicited; no longer simply rejected, but now collectively negotiated. The mediation of the institutional level of the working class movement, particularly at the trade union level, takes on a decisive and irreplaceable importance. The platform of demands that the trade union puts forward is already controlled by those on whom it is supposed to be imposed: by the bosses who are supposed to “take it or leave it”. Through the trade union struggle, working class demands can be nothing more than the reflection of capital's necessities. And yet capital cannot pose this necessity directly, of itself – not even if it wanted to, not even when it reaches its highest point of class awareness. Rather, at this point it acquires quite the reverse awareness: that it must find ways to have its own needs put forward by its enemies, it must articulate its own movement via the organised movements of the workers.

We might ask a question: what happens when the form of working class organisation takes on a content which is wholly alternative; when it refuses to function as an articulation of capitalist society; when it refuses to carry capital's needs via the demands of the working class? The answer is that, at that moment and from that moment, the systems whole mechanism of development is blocked. This is the new concept of the crisis of capitalism that we must start to circulate: no longer the economic crisis, the catastrophic collapse, a *Zusammenbruch*, however momentary, arising from the impossibility of the system's continued functioning. Rather, a political crisis imposed by the subjective movements of the organised workers, via the provocation of a chain of critical conjunctures, within the sole strategy of the working class refusal to resolve the contradictions of capitalism. A tactic of organisation within the structures of capitalist production, but outside of, free from, its political initiative. Of course, it remains necessary to block the economic mechanism and, at the decisive moment, render it incapable of functioning. But the only way to achieve this is via the political refusal of the working class to act as active partner in the whole social process, and furthermore, the refusal of even passive collaboration in capitalist development: in other words, the renunciation of precisely that form of mass struggle which today unifies the movements led by the workers in the advanced capitalist countries. We must say clearly that this form of struggle – for such it is – is no longer enough. Non-collaboration, passivity (even on a mass scale), the refusal (insofar as it is not political, not subjectively organised, not inserted into a strategy, not practiced in tactical terms), the advanced font of spontaneity which has been forced on the class struggle for decades – not only is all this no longer enough to provoke the crisis, but it has become, in fact, an element of stabilisation of capitalist development. It is now one of those same objective mechanisms whereby capitalist initiative now controls and makes use of the class relationship that motivates it. We must break this process before it becomes yet another heavy historical tradition for the working class movement to bear.

A transition to another process is necessary – without, however, losing the basic positive elements

of this one. Obviously non-collaboration must be one of our starting points, and mass passivity at the level of production is the material fact from which we must begin. But at a certain point all this must be reversed into its opposite. When it comes to the point of saying “No”, the refusal must become political; therefore active; therefore subjective; therefore organised. It must once again become antagonism -this time at a higher level. Without this it is impossible to think of opening up a revolutionary process. This is not a matter of instilling in the mass of workers the awareness that they must fight against capital that they must fight for something which will transcend capital and lead into a new dimension of human society. What is generally known as class consciousness is, for us, nothing other than the moment of organisation, the function of the party, the problem of tactics – the channels which must carry the strategic plan through to a point of practical breakthrough. And at the level of pure strategy there is no doubt that this point is provided by the very advanced moment in which this hypothesis of struggle becomes reality: the working class refusal to present demands to capital, the total rejection of the whole trade union terrain, the refusal to limit the class relationship within a formal, legal, contractual form. And this is the same as forcing capital to present the objective needs of capitalist production directly, as such. It cuts out working class mediation of development. It blocks the working class articulation of the mechanism. In the final event, this means depriving capital of its content, of the class relationship which is its basis. For a period the class relationship must be exercised by the working class, through its party – just as up till now it has been exercised by the capitalist class, through its State.

It is here that the balance of domination between the two classes is set into reverse, no longer just in theory, but also in practice. In fact, the revolutionary process sees the working class becoming ever-increasingly what it actually is: a ruling class on its own terrain (a specifically political terrain), a conquering power which, in destroying the present, takes revenge for a whole past (not merely its own) of subordination and exploitation. This is the sense of the hypothesis which poses, at the highest point of this process, on the one hand capital making demands, and on the other hand the working class refusal. And this presupposes the existence of a political force of the working class, organised per se, and able to constitute an autonomous power of decision in relation to the whole of society, a No Man’s Land where capitalist order cannot reach, and from which the new barbarians of the proletariat can embark at any moment. Thus the final act of the revolution requires that there should already be the workers’ State within capitalist society – the workers having power in their own right and deciding the end of capital. But this would not be a pre-figuration of the future, because the future, from the working class point of view, does not exist; only a block on the present, the impossibility for the present to continue functioning under its present organisation, and thus an instance of its possible reorganisation under an opposite notion of power. An autonomous working class political power is the only weapon that can block the functioning of capital’s economic mechanisms. In this sole sense the workers’ State of tomorrow is the party of today.

This brings us back to the concept, which we attributed to Marx, of communism as the party, which instead of constructing a model of the future society, supplies a practical means for the destruction of the present society.

13.3 Silvia Federici & Mario Montano, *Theses on the Mass Worker and Social Capital* (1972)

1 The years from the beginning of the century up to the English general strike of 1926 witness this crucial new feature in class struggle: Whereas deep contradictions between developed and backward

areas characterize capitalism at this stage and confine it to national levels of organization, the political autonomy and independence of the working class reach an international level: For the first time, capital is bypassed by the workers at an international level. The first international cycle, roughly 1904 to 1906, is a cycle of mass strikes which at times develops into violent actions and insurrections. In Russia, it starts with the Putilov strike and develops into the 1905 revolution. 1904 is the date of the first Italian general strike. In Germany, the spontaneous Ruhr miners' strike of 1905 on the eight-hour issue and the Amburg general strike of 1906 lead a class wave that overflows into a large network of middle-sized firms. In the US, the miners' strikes of 1901 and 1904 and the foundation of the IWW in 1905 seem to be a premonition of the struggles to come.

2 The second cycle starts with 1911. We see the same class vanguards initiate the struggle: In the US the vanguards are the coal miners of West Virginia, the Harriman railroad workers, and the Lawrence textile workers; in Russia they are the Lena gold miners of 1912; in Germany they are the workers of the 1912 mass strike of the Ruhr. World War I represents the occasion for the widest development of class struggle in the US (1,204 strikes in 1914; 1,593 in 1915; 3,789 in 1916; and 4,450 in 1917 – and the National labour Board sanctions a number of victories: collective bargaining, equal pay for women, guaranteed minimum wage) while laying the groundwork for a third international cycle.

Since the War has produced a boom in precision manufacturing, electrical machinery, optics, and other fields, the class weight of the superskilled workers of these sectors is enormously increased in Germany and elsewhere. They are the workers who form the backbone of the councils in the German revolution, the Soviet Republic in Bavaria, and the Italian factory occupation of 1919. By 1919, the year of the Seattle General Strike, 4,160,000 workers in the US (20.2% of the entire labour force) are mobilized by the struggle. In the international circulation of struggles, Russia, the “weakest link”, breaks. The capitalist nightmare comes true: The initiative of the working class establishes a “workers' state”. The class that first made its appearance in the political arena in 1848 and that learned the need for political organization from its defeat in the Paris Commune is now moving in an international way. The peculiar commodity, labour power, the passive, fragmented receptacle of factory exploitation, is now behaving as an international political actor, the political working class.

3 The specific political features of these three cycles of struggle lie in the dynamics of their circulation. The struggle starts with class vanguards, and only later does it circulate throughout the class and develop into mass actions. That is, the circulation of struggles follows the structure of the class composition that predominates in these years. That composition consists of a large network of sectors with diverse degrees of development, varying weight in the economy, and different levels of skill and experience. The large cleavages that characterize such a class composition (the dichotomy between a skilled “labour aristocracy” and the mass of the unskilled is one prominent example) necessitates the role of class vanguards as political and organizational pivots. It is through an alliance between the vanguards and the proletarian masses that class cleavages are progressively overcome and mass levels of struggles are reached. That is, the “political re-composition of the working class” is based on its industrial structure, the “material articulation of the labour force (labour power)”.

4 The organizational experiments of the working class in these years are by necessity geared to this specific class composition. Such is the case with the Bolshevik model, the Vanguard Party. Its politics of class consciousness “from the outside” must re-compose the entire working class

around the demands of its advanced sectors; its “politics of alliances” must bridge the gap between advanced workers and the masses. But such is also the case with the Councils model, whose thrust toward the self-management of production is materially bound to the figure of the skilled worker (that is, the worker with a unique, fixed, subjective relationship to tools and machinery, and with a consequent self identification as “producer”). In Germany in particular, where the machine-tool industry developed exclusively on the basis of the exceptional skill of workers, the Councils express their “managerial” ideology most clearly. It is at such a relatively-high level of professionalization – with a worker/tools relationship characterized by precise skills, control over production techniques, direct involvement with the work plan, and co-operation between execution and planning functions – that workers can identify with their “useful labour” in a program for self-management of the factory. In the heat of the struggle, this program gains the support of productive engineers.

5 With the Councils, “class consciousness” is expressed most clearly as the consciousness of “producers”. The Councils do not organize the working class on the basis of a political program of struggles. The Council structure reproduces – by team, shop, and plant – the capitalist organization of labour, and “organizes” workers along their productive role, as labour power, producers. Since the Councils assume the existing organization for the production of capital (a given combination of variable and constant capital, of workers and machines) as the basis for their socialist project, their hypothesis of a workers’ democratic-self-management can only pre-figure the workers’ management of the production of capital, that is, the workers’ management of their very exploitation.

6 Yet, the revolutionary character of all workers’ struggles must always be measured in terms of their relationship to the capitalists’ project. From this viewpoint, it becomes clear that the organization of the Councils, by reproducing the material articulation of the labour force as it is. Also freezes development at a certain level of the organic composition of capital (the level of fixed, subjective relationship between workers and machines). Therefore, it challenges capital’s power to bring about whatever technological leap and re-organization of the labour force it may need. In this sense the Councils remain a revolutionary experience. As for the ideological aspect of the self-management project, the hypothesis of a workers’ management of the production of capital, it also becomes clear that “the pre-figuration of a more advanced level of capitalist development was the specific way in which workers refused to yield to the capitalist needs of the time, by trying to provoke the failure of capital’s plan and expressing the autonomous working-class need for conquering power”. (De Caro) It is in the workers’ refusal to be pushed back into a malleable labour force under capitalist rule, and in their demand for power over the productive process (whether in the form of the Councils’ “self-management” and freeze over development, or in the Bolsheviks’ plan for development under “workers’ control”) that the fundamental political novelty of these cycles of struggle lies: on an international level, the workers’ attempt to divert the direction of economic development, express autonomous goals, and assume political responsibility for managing the entire productive machine.

7 When the capitalists move to counter-attack, they are not prepared to grasp the two main givens of the cycles of struggle: the international dimension of class struggle, and the emergence of labour power as the political working class. Thus while the international unification of the working-class struggle raises the need for an international unification of capital’s response, the system of reparations imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty merely seals the inter-capitalist split. While confronted by the international working class, the capitalists can only perceive their national

labour powers. The outcome is a strategic separation between their international and domestic responses. Internationally, world revolution appears to the capitalists as coming “from the outside”, from the exemplary leadership of the USSR: hence the politics of military isolation of the Revolution in Russia. Domestically, all the capitalists know is the traditional tools of their rule: (1) the violent annihilation of workers’ political organizations (the Palmer raids and the destruction of the IWW; Fascism in Italy; bloody suppression of the “Red Army” in the Ruhr, and so forth), which breaks the ground for (2) technological manipulation of the labour force (Taylorism, the “scientific organization of labour”) as a means of politically controlling class composition.

8 Taylorism, the “scientific organization of labour”, the technological leap of the Twenties serves but one purpose: to destroy the specific articulation of the labour force which was the basis for the political re-composition of the working class during the first two decades of the century (Thesis 3). The introduction of the assembly line cuts through traditional cleavages in the labour force, thus producing a veritable revolution in the composition of the entire working class. The emergence of the mass worker, the human appendage to the assembly line, is the overcoming of the vanguard/mass dichotomy upon which the Bolshevik Party is modeled. The very “aristocracy of labour” that capital created after 1870 in its attempt to control the international circulation of the Paris Commune (the very workers supposedly “bribed” by the eight-hour work day, Saturdays off, and a high level of wages) became one of the pivots of the circulation of struggles in the Teens. Through the assembly line capital launches a direct political attack, in the form of technology, on the skills and the factory model of the Councils’ professional workers. This attack brings about the material destruction of that level of organic composition which served as the basis of the self-management project. (The political unity between engineers and workers is also under attack. From Taylorism on, engineers will appear to the workers not as direct producers, but as mere functionaries of the scientific organization of exploitation; and the self-management project, devoid of its original class impact, will reappear as a caricature, the “managerial revolution” to come.)

9 Thus, capital’s response to the struggles follows the Nineteenth Century’s “technological path to repression”: It entails breaking whatever political unification the working class has achieved during a given cycle of struggles, by means of a technological revolution in class composition. Constant manipulation of class composition through continual technological innovations provides a tool for controlling the class “from within” through its existence as mere “labour power”. The re-organization of labour is a means to the end of the “political decomposition” of the working class. Since the working class has demanded leadership over the entire society, to push it back into the factory appears as an appropriate political move. Within this strategy, factory and society are to remain divided. The specific form of the labour process in the capitalist factory (that is, the plan) has yet to be imposed on the entire society. Social anarchy is counterposed to the factory plan. The social peace and the growing mass production of the Twenties seem to prove that traditional weapons have been successful again. It will take the Depression to dissipate this belief.

10 With 1929, all the tools of the technological attack on the working class turn against capital. The economic and technological measures for containing the working class in the Twenties (re-conversion of the war economy, continuous technological change, and high productivity of labour) have pushed supply tremendously upward, while demand lags hopelessly behind. Investments decline in a spiral toward the great crash. In a very real sense, 1929 is the workers’ revenge. Mass production and the assembly line, far from securing stability, have raised the old contradictions to a higher

level. Capital is now paying a price for its faith in Say's law ("supply creates its own demand"), with its separation of output and market, producers and consumers, factory and society, labour power and political class. As such it remains caught in a tragic impasse, between the inadequacy of the economic and technological tools of the past and the lack of new, political ones. It will take Roosevelt-Keynes to produce them.

11 While Hoover resumes the old search for external "international causes", Roosevelt's approach is entirely domestic: a re-distribution of income to sustain the internal demand. Keynesian strategy is already emerging – keeping up demand by allowing wages to rise and by reducing unemployment through public expenditure. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NRA) of 1933 raises wage rates, encourages unionization, and so forth at the same time that it authorizes both massive investment in public works through the PWA and large relief funds. The political break with the past is enormous. In the classical view, the flexibility of wages is the main assumption. Workers' struggles are seen as an outside interference with a self-regulating economy: labour organizations belong with other "institutional factors" that maintain wages "artificially", while it is the State's role to preserve the economy against such artificial interference. In the Keynesian model, the downward rigidity of wages is the main assumption; wages are taken as independent variables. The State becomes the economic subject in charge of planning appropriate redistributions of income to support the "effective demand".

12 Keynes' assumption of the downward rigidity of wages is "the most important discovery of Western Marxism" (Tronti). As wages become an independent variable, the traditional law of the "value of labour" collapses. No "law" but only labour through its own struggles can determine the value of labour. Class antagonism is brought into the heart of production and is taken as the material given on which capital must rebuild its strategy. The NRA is precisely a political maneuver to transform class antagonism from an unpredictable element of risk and instability into a dynamic factor of development. Through its emphasis on the income effect of wages, as opposed to the mere cost effect, the New Deal chooses wages as the mainspring of growth, but within precise limits: Wages must rise harmoniously with profits. The necessary control over wage dynamics requires the institutionalization of class struggle. For workers' struggles inside capital's plan means working class inside capital's State. Hence the need for the emergence of two new political figures in the Thirties: capital as the new "State-as-Planner" and the working class as organized "labour".

13 The turn toward State-as-Planner is a radical break with all previous policies of State intervention. The NRA regulates the whole of industrial production. The certainty of a capitalist future has been shaken to its roots by the crisis: The NRA "codes", involving the totality of the capitalist class (95% of all industrial employers), guarantee that a future exists. As the depth of the crisis makes the State's function of "correcting mistakes" obsolete, the State must assume the responsibility of direct investment, "net contribution" to purchasing power. The State must expose the myth of "sound finance" and impose budget deficits. It is no longer a juridical figure (the bourgeois government of law); it is an economic agent (the capitalist plan). (All this represents a historical watershed, the beginning of a long political process that will culminate in the "incomes policy", the wage-price guideposts of the New Frontier.) Most important, as the representative of the collective capitalist, the State's main function is the planning of the class struggle itself. Capital's plan for development must establish an institutional hold on the working class.

14 Hence, the need for labour as the political representative of the working class in the capitalist State. But the technological leap of the Twenties has entirely undermined the trade unions, by making their professional structure obsolete: By 1929, the AFL controls only 7% of the industrial labour force. By cutting through the old class composition and producing a massification of the class, Taylorism has only provided the material basis for a political re-composition at a higher level. As long as the mass worker remains unorganized he/she is entirely unpredictable. Thus with "Section 7a" of the NRA and later with the Wagner Act the collective capitalist begins to accept the workers' right to organize and bargain collectively. It will be no smooth process, for while capitalists as a class support the NRA, the individual capitalist will resist its consequences at the level of his own factory. The birth of the CIO will make the victory of a thirty-year-long struggle for mass-production unionism. Capital and the mass worker will now face each other as the State-as-Planner and organized labour.

15 Class struggle, once the mortal enemy of capitalism to be dealt with through bloodshed, now becomes the main-spring of planned economic development. The historical development of labour power as the political working class is acknowledged by capital's plan in this major theoretical breakthrough. What was conceived of as a passive, fragmented object of exploitation and technological manipulation is now accepted as an active, unified political subject. Its needs can no longer be violently repressed; they must be satisfied, to ensure continued economic development. Previously, the working class was perceived as capital's immediate negation and the only way to extract profits was to decrease wages and increase exploitation. Now, the closed interdependence of working class and capital is made clear by the strategy of increasing wages to turn out a profit. Whereas the reduction of the working class to mere labour power was reflected in a strategic split between factory (exploitation) and society (repression) (Thesis 9), capital's political acknowledgment of the working class requires the unifying of society and factory. Capital's plan is outgrowing the factory to include society through a centralized State.

This involves the development of the historical processes leading to the stage of social capital: the subordination of the individual capitalist to the collective capitalist, the subordination of all social relations to production relations, and the reduction of all forms of work to wage labour.

16 The signing of the NRA by the President (June 1933) marks the beginning of a new cycle of struggle. The second half of 1933 witnesses as many strikes as the whole of 1932 with three and a half times as many workers. By June 1934, with sharply reduced unemployment and a 38% growth of the total industrial payroll, the strike wave gathers momentum: 7.2% of the entire labour force (a peak not to be matched until 1937) is mobilized by the struggle. The crucial sectors are being affected – among them steel and auto workers, the West Coast longshoremen, and almost all textile workers, united behind wage, hours, and union recognition demands. 1935 is the year of both the CIO and the Wagner Act. Between the summer of 1935 and the spring of 1937, employment surpasses the 1929 level, from an index of 89.2 to 112.3. In a context of relative price stability, industrial production moves from an index of 85 to 118, and wages move from 69.1 to 110.1. The massification of the working-class struggle and the economic development of capitalist recovery are two sides of the same process: The struggle circulates to small factories and marginal industries while the sit-downs begin at Fire stone, Goodyear, and Goodrich. 1937 is the year of 4,740 strikes, the peak year in the generalization of the mass worker's struggle. In February GM capitulates; in March US Steel recognizes the Steel Workers Organizing Committee and accepts its basic demands: 10% wage increase for a 40-hour week.

17 The crucial aspect of the struggles throughout the New Deal is the general emergence of wages (wages, hours, unionization), the workers' share of the value produced mutually acknowledged by both capitalists and workers as the battlefield for the new stage of class struggle. For capital, wages are a means of sustaining development, while for the workers they represent the weapon that relaunches class offensive. It is precisely this contradictory political nature of wages (the means of workers' "integration" on one hand, and the basis for the class's political re-composition and attack on profit on the other) that causes Roosevelt's failure to ensure steady growth while at the same time maintaining control of the working class. To the threatening massification of struggles, big business responds with an economic recession, a refusal to invest, a "political strike of capital". (B.Rauch: *The History of the New Deal*)

18 The economic recession of 1937-38 is the first example of capital's use of the crisis as a means of regaining initiative in the class struggle. Inflation, unemployment, and wage cuts are weapons that break the workers' offensive and are means for a new political de-composition of the working class. The political necessity of the economic crisis shows dramatically that the Keynesian model is not sufficient to guarantee stability; only through an act of open violence can capital re-establish its domination over workers. Yet, it is only with the introduction of crises as a means of controlling the class that the Keynesian model can show its true value. While in 1933 the use of class struggle as the propelling element of capitalist development was the only alternative to economic recession, five years later, with the "Roosevelt recession", "crisis" is revealed as the alternative face of "development". Development and crisis become the two poles of one cycle. The "State-as-Crisis" is thus simply a moment of the "State-as-Planner" – planner of crisis as a pre-condition for a new development. From now on, capital's crises will no longer be "natural", uncontrollable events, but the result of a political decision, essential moments of actual "political business cycles". (Kalecki)

19 The political figure which dominates class struggle from the 1930s on is the mass worker. The technological leap of the Twenties has produced both the economic recession of 1929 and the political subject of class struggle in the Thirties (Thesis 8). The "scientific organization" of mass production necessitates a malleable, highly interchangeable labour force, easily movable from one productive sector to another and easily adjustable to each new level of capital's organic composition. By 1926, 43% of the workers at Ford require only one day for their training, while 36% require less than a week. The fragmentation and simplification of the work process undermine the static relationship between worker and job, disconnecting wage labour from "useful labour" entirely. With the mass worker, "abstract labour" reaches its fullest historical development: The intellectual abstraction of Capital is revealed as worker's sensuous activity.

20 From the plant to the university, society, becomes an immense assembly line, where the seeming variety of jobs disguises the actual generalization of the same abstract labour. This is neither the emergence of a "new working class" nor the massification of a classless "middle class", but a new widening of the material articulation of the working class proper. (In this process, however, lies the basis for much ideology. Since all forms of work are subsumed under capital's production, industrial production seems to play less and less of a role, and the factory seems to disappear. Thus, what is in fact an increasing process of proletarianization – the main accumulation of capital being the accumulation of labour power itself – is misrepresented as a process of tertiarization, in which the class dissolves into the abstract "people". Hence the peculiar inversion whereby the notions of "class" and "proletariat" appear as "abstractions", while "the people" becomes concrete.)

21 From the worker's viewpoint, interchangeability, mobility, and massification turn into positive factors. They undermine all divisions by productive role and sector. They provide the material basis for the political re-composition of the entire working class. By destroying the individual worker's pride in his or her skills, they liberate workers as a class from an identification with their role as producers. With the political demand of "more money and less work", the increasing alienation of labour becomes a progressive disengagement of the political struggles of the working class from its economic existence as mere labour power. From the workers' viewpoint, wages cannot be a reward for productivity and work, but are instead the fruits of their struggles. They cannot be a function of capital's need for development, they must be an expression of the autonomous needs of the class. In the heat of the struggle, the true separation between labour power and working class reaches its most threatening revolutionary peak. "It is quite precisely the separation of the working class from itself, from itself as wage labour, and hence from capital. It is the separation of its political strength from its existence as an economic category."

13.4 Sergio Bologna, *The Tribe of Moles* (1977)

This article is a provisional attempt to trace the internal development of the autonomous class movement in Italy, which led to the explosive confrontation around the University occupations in Spring 1977. Such an analysis is only meaningful if it allows us to uncover the new class composition underlying these struggles, and to indicate the first elements of a programme to advance and further generalise the movement.

Here we analyse the movement primarily in its relation to the Italian political system and the changes it has undergone through the period of crisis since 1968. With the Historic Compromise strategy of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) since 1974, the form of the State has taken a new leap forwards – towards the organisation of a "party system" which no longer aims to mediate or represent conflicts in civil society, but is increasingly compact and counterposed against movements in civil society, and against the political programme of the new composition of the class.

The wartime anti-Fascist resistance in Italy laid the basis for a form of the State based on the "party system". The new regime inherited from Fascism fairly powerful instruments for an independent political "interference" in the process of reproduction of classes (normally left to the development of productive relations and the real subsumption of labour to capital). These instruments were: credit; the State-controlled industries; and public spending.

The party system thus came to control the basic sectors of the economy and the important service sectors. Through this control, and within it that of the Christian Democrats (the hegemonic party from the crisis of the Parri Government in November 1945 to the Centre-Left coalitions of the 'sixties) it was able to negotiate with US imperialism and the multinationals, both domestic and foreign, regarding the international division of labour, the rate of increase of the working class, the type of working class to be promoted – in other words, to organise the dynamic of class relations in a way that corresponded to the plans for political stability. In certain regions of the northern "industrial triangle", the reproduction of social classes was left to the classic mechanisms of concentration-massification of labour-power in large-scale industry. In this sector it was left to productive capital – private and public – to bring about that "rational demographic composition", the lack of which (for Italy, in contrast to the USA) Gramsci had so lamented in his *Prison Notebooks* (see the article *Americanism and Fordism*). Here, in other words, a society was to be developed made up entirely of producers, consisting solely of wage labour and capital.

It should be added that this mechanism of advanced capitalist development produced not only factory workers, but also a large proportion of tertiary workers, so that regions like Liguria, Lombardy or Veneto have a higher percentage of employees working in tertiary activities than some regions in the South. In these latter regions, however, the intervention of the “party system” in the mechanism of reshaping and reproducing the classes seemed to take place with greater autonomy from the movements of capital.

The Form of the State – Open or Latent The political agreements established with large-scale European industry meanwhile permitted a large number of agricultural proletarians to be transferred abroad; the production of a factory working class was piloted with great care, according to the principle that the command of fixed capital should always be overpowering. At the same time, support was given to all forms of agricultural production that maintained irrational demographic relations; there was a flow of subsidising finance aimed to “congeal” non-productive relations and social strata, and a flow of revenue – “money as money” – acquired through employment in the public administration. All these had the effect of reproducing a disproportionately large small-to-middle bourgeoisie, based on income as revenue, which represented the social base necessary for the stability of the Christian Democrat regime.

In the long term, the effects of this policy for the reproduction of the classes blunted the revolutionary effects of the real subjection of labour to capital, off-setting the growth of the working class with a disproportionate growth of small-to-middle bourgeoisie, in receipt of revenue; not hostile to the working class, but passive, not anti-Union but “autonomous”, not productive but saving, and hence allowing a social recycling of the income received by it. But this first class dynamic was shattered and thrown off course, first by the working-class offensive at the end of the 1960s, and then, a few years later, by the violent effects of the crisis – which we shall examine later.

The form of the State under the post-War “party system” is a latent form: what normally appears on the surface is a method of mediating and representing conflicts. On the one side are the governing parties that dominate the bureaucratic-repressive apparatus of the State, and on the other the opposition parties, which are the receptacles for mediating the drives and contradictions of civil society. The form of the State comes out in the open in certain historical moments, when the crisis of the preceding regime and the development of a new class composition risk escaping from the control of the dialectic between Government and opposition. This happened in 1945-46, after the armed struggle against Fascism. The parties chose to replace their relations with the classes, with the masses, by mutual relations among themselves; and the Communist Party chose to prioritise its relations with the other parties that backed the constitution of the Republic, rather than its relations with the class and the armed movement. In a similar way, in this latest period, and playing on a similar “state of emergency” in order to overcome the present crisis (as with the post-War “Reconstruction”), ever since it chose the path of the Historic Compromise (and more vigorously since the Elections of June 1976), the Communist Party has privileged the strengthening of its link with the other parties – and in particular with the Christian Democrats. This was in order to “resolve the crisis of the State”, to redefine the “party system” in terms of concord rather than conflict. By now, the unity of the parties at a political and programmatic level is being concluded like a steel dome erected over the needs of the working class. The “party system” no longer aims to represent conflicts, nor to mediate or organise them: it delegates them to “economic interests” and poses itself as the specific form of the State, separate from and hostile to movements in society. The political system becomes more rigid, more frantically counterposed to civil society. The party system no longer “receives” the thrusts from the base; it controls and represses them.

The Concretisation of the New Form of the State

This race among the parties (above all the PCI) to arrive at ever-tighter links, this new edition of the constitutional pact signed during the Resistance and then violated by the Christian Democrats, is happening today under the banner of the ideology of the crisis and the imposition of austerity. The connective chain which simultaneously binds the parties within the new constitutional pact, and counterposes them as a machine hostile to civil society, to the society which expresses new needs, to the class composition, is represented by the ideology of the crisis. The form of the State is now becoming open and explicit through the consolidation of the pact within the "party system". It does not, in other words, depend on the strengthening of the military-repressive apparatus: the latter is subordinate to the level of homogeneity of the "party system".

This process is a complex one, and has met with a thousand obstacles: but by now it is clearly the only way if the present power equilibria are to be maintained. Since the student uprisings in 1977, the movement towards an all-party coalition to confront the crisis has accelerated.

But if the form of the State, which is becoming explicit, cannot be reduced simply to the strengthening of its repressive apparatus, how then is it concretised? So far, at least, it has been concretised through a system of values, of political norms, unwritten rules governing all parties in the democratic arena, which *de facto* decide what is legitimate, what is legal or illegal, what is productive or unproductive, etc. Since the framework for this consensus is provided by a precise ideology of crisis, a certain type of intellectual has assumed major importance as a propagator or exponent of the "collective consciousness" in this period.

Treason of the Intellectuals, Liberalisation of access to education, and the world of revenue The front-line responsibility for providing the basic arguments behind the ideology of crisis clearly lies with the profession of economists. This applies not only to the high priests of the regime. It includes young economists who have taken up university posts, backed by Cambridge or Harvard promotion, and very often open to links with the trade unions. Faced with the alternatives of working-class commitment or bourgeois-academic economic science, they have invariably, more or less explicitly, opted for the latter. In certain cases, precisely through a differing interpretation of the dominant ideology of the crisis, they have contributed to it, and have helped to "close the circle". Such can be said, to give just one example, of the "New Left" economists of the Modena faculty: this could have become a centre for rigorous and well-documented counter-information to dismantle the false arguments behind the ideology of the crisis. Instead they preferred to keep quiet, or provided more lessons to the working class on prudence... how to be reasonable... how to surrender. This is only one example of the more general "treason of the intellectuals" of the 1968 generation, which has been one of the main factors allowing the task of Restoration to take place in the Universities in recent years, and has contributed to creating the radical culture gap between the movement of '68 and the movement of '77.

If the Italian political system has been able to interfere autonomously in the process of reproduction of classes via various sorts of State provision, one of the most important of these has clearly been the liberalisation of access to Universities since 1969. Some interpret this move as a means of eroding the working-class hegemony that matured in the wave of struggles in the late 'sixties, isolating it by promoting upward social mobility. If a project of this sort was ever formulated explicitly, we are not aware of it. Let us examine the mechanism. The liberalisation of access to Universities, at least on paper, favours social promotion. A working-class youth can escape the path of the previous generation, can avoid the necessity of factory or manual work. This operation is financed by distribution in the form of *presalari* (grants) – the University of Padova alone accounts for over \$1,000,000 a year: and by an increase of teaching staff and supplementary part-time staff.

At this point the high priests of our economy begin to complain that the criteria for financing this social mobility determine in advance the class that will emerge from the liberalised University system: a lower-middle bourgeoisie which is subsidised and “living off welfare” rather than productive or disposed to work. They complain, in other words, that the prospect of jobs that differ from factory work is not a sufficient incentive to productive labour, but rather acts as a signpost towards receipt of income in the sphere of circulation, towards the world of revenue (money as money, removed from the circuit of productive capital). At this point the whole “party system” joins in the great debate on the reproduction of classes in Italy, its distortions, imbalances etc., the general conclusion being that it is not sufficient to reproduce a lower-to-middle bourgeoisie in an anti-working-class role, if this then becomes an unproductive class in receipt of revenue!

And so the scapegoat mythology of “Hunt the Parasite” – the lynchpin of the crisis ideology – comes to the fore. Backed by the “scientific” revelations of Sylos Labini, Gorreri, etc, this new game starts in earnest. A sort of vague egalitarianism emerges, which scrutinises the income of the clerical worker, the student and the tertiary worker, and says nothing, for example, about the transformation of capital-which-is-productive to capital-which-is-productive-of-interest: in its most shameful form, this egalitarianism assumes tones of worker chauvinism. It appears that it is no longer capital that exploits the worker, but the postman, the milkman and the student. These are the first shots in that “class analysis” which will later become the official ideology and the preferred argument of the super-paid editorial writers of the Regime’s press. It is a crude and effective ideology. The liberalisation of University access is made to coincide with the crisis, with youth unemployment, with the reduction of the productive base, with the enlargement of the area of State subsidy. But most of all, to it is traced the radical new phase of the political behaviour of the masses. The circle closes: what was previously defined as “youth desperation”, as “marginality” – in other words, as a perverse effect, created by the crisis, of a mechanism which had been created and conceived as a means of stabilising the system and acting (though this is now quietly forgotten) in an anti-worker function!

Blocking Working Class Autonomy and Occupying the Political Spaces It is not easy to untangle the mass of lies and half-truths which are contained in this distorted version of the class dynamic. The best answer is to return to the roots where it all began – the cycle of struggle of 1968-69. The problem for the “party system” at that stage was not only that of blocking and marginalising a working class social hegemony which had shown itself in Italy for the first time since the Second World War. It was the problem, rather of uprooting the political forms in which this hegemony had manifested itself – the political form of autonomy.

One answer lay in the technological-type provisions that were introduced in order to break up the central nucleus of the class (the change in organic composition, etc). But less obvious was the process by which the “party system” began the conquest of the terrain of working-class autonomy, presenting itself for the first time in the form of explicit State power.

This occurred in the factory itself, with the gradual removal of effective power from the delegates (shop stewards) in the factory Councils, and above all with the manipulation of the Workers’ Assemblies, their gradual destruction as organs of independent working-class initiative and choice. The factories, which had been free from traditional party politics for more than a decade, and in which the organisation of autonomy from “politics” in the established sense was won in the cycle of mass struggles from the late ’sixties onwards, now once again became a political terrain of manipulation by the “party system”. All the forms and instances of class autonomy, through which a real space for independent class politics had been conquered (even those related to trade-union mediation, such as shop steward organisation), were taken over and allowed to atrophy – and

meanwhile restructuration rooted out and scattered the most homogeneous and militant groups in the plants. The “party system” took control of the organisational forms that remained, such as the Works Councils, turning them into parliamentary talking-shops.

At the same time, the extra-parliamentary groups began their suicidal retreat from the factory, and in general ceased to give much attention to problems of class composition. This has led to a situation where, today, the factory and the working class are almost unknown entities.

The larger the political space conquered by the extra-institutional movements, and the wider the cultural territory and the system of values and behaviour that these impose on decisive sections of the class, the more the form of the State as “party system” becomes increasingly open and aggressive.

But the form of the State cannot live only as a power that is hostile to extra-institutional movements: it needs a basic legitimation – namely the legitimation of its coincidence with the laws of capitalist accumulation. By making itself the interpreter of the ideology of the crisis, by organising the new constraint-to-work and the policy of austerity and sacrifice, the State-form of the “party system” arrives at the highest point of integration within the system of capital, by a process of gradual abandonment of its autonomy. But what, then, are we to make of the claim by certain heirs of Togliatti that there exists an “autonomy of the political”? Where is this autonomy? Even where this autonomy had the greatest substance – in the process of reproduction of classes – the violence of the crisis has brought everything under the iron rule of the laws of capital.

...

The Total Subordination of the Party System to the Politics of Crisis

To conclude: inflation and the mechanisms of the crisis have considerably eroded the power of the “party system” to intervene autonomously in the process of reproduction of classes in Italy. The relative autonomy of the political distribution of income has been greatly narrowed. The possibility of creating status differences via income differentials, dispensing cash through transfers of income, supplementing incomes in the public services etc has been diminished. The question of “rational demographic composition” (to which Gramsci referred in the 1930s) is now coming to depend primarily on capitalist development alone, on the organic composition of aggregate capital. Even the process of tertiary growth or creation of unproductive sectors now depends more on the development of fixed capital than on any autonomous intervention on the part of the political elites.

Nobody would deny that the “party system” had the power in past years to interfere with some independence in this process – via economic controls over credit and distribution of cash as revenue, or through export of the proletariat. But at the same time, the “distorting effect” of these choices is deliberately exaggerated by the PCI and the official labour movement. Their result overall does not seem especially different (for example in the case of the growth of tertiary activity) from the developments in other industrial countries. Nor have they resulted, at least until recently, in any significant change in the distribution of income.

If anything, they have created a social and industrial structure acutely sensitive to the problem of savings – permitting a centralisation of unproductive incomes and their recycling in the form of money capital and public spending. The powers that the “party system” does still deploy, no longer over the reproduction of classes, but over the new class aggregation that has been formed through the crisis, are located at a different level, (ie in externalised forms of control at the socio-territorial level to disaggregate and disintegrate the unity of the class, and in perverse relations with specific sectors of speculative capital such as the property market.)

It is from within these narrow limits that the new form of the State is derived. This is not to be seen as the concluding phase of the much-vaunted “autonomy of the political” vis-a-vis “economic” development, but rather as an entirely opposite process: that of the total subordination of the “party system” to the politics of the crisis.

The reproduction of classes has become a problem of political legitimation rather than material intervention: a question of social and cultural identity, of acceptance or refusal to accept the norms of social behaviour required and laid down by the form of the State. Classes have tended to lose their “objective” characteristics and become defined in terms of political subjectivity. But in this process the major force of redefinition has come from below: in the continuous reproduction and invention of systems of counter-culture and struggle in the sphere of everyday living, which become ever more “illegal”. The liberation of this area of autonomy outside and against official social institutions, is stronger than the system of values the “party system” seeks to impose.

Hence the new form of the State, or rather its unmasking, already finds itself in a critically weak condition. To turn to the bureaucratic-repressive apparatus, to a “power-State” pure and simple, would mean the end of the “party system” itself, as established for more than thirty years.

What we have witnessed in the crisis is the subjection of the political system on the part of capital, the destruction of its “autonomy”. This cannot be properly understood unless we see it in relation to the centralisation of capitalist command which defines the politics of the crisis for all parties (ie the area of “politics” itself). This centralisation is formally represented in monetary institutions, from central banks to the IMF.

For the past three years, we in Primo Maggio have been pointing out a fact which is now generally accepted: economic policy choices – and hence also the criteria upon which class relations in national states are being conditioned – are no longer the result of negotiation or bargaining between parties, unions and so on (in other words mediated relations of force between classes and interests, but are laid down by external constraints determined by (in the last instance) the International Monetary Fund.

It is this new institutional reality of power on an international scale that provides the basic guidelines for the logic of current ideology of the crisis and scarcity, and hence also the propaganda for austerity measures. The Carter Administration has developed this particular aspect of money as capitalist command as the basis of US global policy. The relaunching of US hegemony depends in addition on results already acquired, which allow the USA control over scarcity, especially in the key sectors of food and energy internationally. (“The US have emerged as the key source of global nutritional stability” – Secretary Brzezinski, in Foreign Policy No. 23). Every “national” choice in the area of basic energy and food must come up against an international division of labour that the USA intends to have respected. The technology of food processing will be as jealously defended as petroleum or uranium. Today it is command over wage commodities above all that regulates the relations between the USA and the rest of the world. Since the PCI victory in the 1976 elections and its acceptance of Italy’s membership of NATO, followed by the recent DC electoral revival, the Carter Administration, while cautious, has come round to the realistic recognition that the only solution for political management of the crisis in Italy is the reinforcement of the pact binding together the “party system” and a “government of majority parties”, including the PCI: as the sole condition, in other words, for the implementation of “austerity by consent”.

The Recomposition of the Working Class in the Period Since the Late 1960's

So far we have concentrated on the recomposition of capitalist command in the crisis and the unfolding of the State form through rigidification of the "party system". We must now turn to the other side – class recomposition. To take the factory or the University as a starting point is not a problem, in that both are enclaves of resistance and recovery of an alternative class politics – either starting point would serve us just as well.

If we take the subjective development of the movement through the period since the cycle of class offensive in the late 'sixties, we can distinguish two main phases of struggle. In the first, from 1969 to the oil crisis of 1973-74, the attack on the central militant core of the working class by means of restructuration, reorganisation of production etc, was combined with the "strategy of tension" (terroristic use of secret services, clandestine proto-Fascist activity backed by the State, with considerable use of Fascist personnel). The most recent generation of militants formed around the movement of 1968-69 was consumed in the response to this attack: following the "parenthesis" of the workers' offensive, they returned to the classic schemas of the party form – the tight relation between programme and organisation, and a perspective on the struggle for power articulated according to the tactics of a militant anti-Fascist movement, combined with the conquest of the formal, electoral level of politics. During this first phase the "party system" was not yet "congealed" into the form of the State: it was divided in a sharp opposition between an executive, which mobilised the clandestine levels of the State (from the secret services to the magistracy), and an opposition which revived the democratic values and traditions of the anti-Fascist Resistance. This was, in other words, a phase of partial re-absorption of the preceding forms of class autonomy by the "party system", a recovery of the ideological and organisational traditions of the official working-class movement: a certain "introjection" of the "party system" within the revolutionary movement itself.

As regards the relation between subjectivity and models of organisation on the revolutionary Left, this first period, from the State-Fascist bombing provocation of Piazza Fontana (Milan, December 1969) to the eventual defeat of the "strategy of tension" (even if its ramifications continued up to the June 1976 Election), was marked by a general rejection of the creative hypotheses of the movement of 1968-69. This was accompanied by the rebirth in the movement of ultra-Bolshevik models of organisation, or – in the case of groups like the MLS (Workers' Socialist Movement, based on the Milan student movement), Manifesto, Avanguardia Operaia and PDUP – of traditional historical Togliattian models, embellished, at most, with Maoism. There was, in other words, a certain revival of the historic organisational; epoch of the Italian Communist Party and movement, from Gramsci to the resistance.

This revival drastically marginalised the classic "workerist" area of autonomy inherited from the worker-student movement of 1968-69, as well as the anarchist, situationist, and more intransigent Marxist-Leninist groups.

The central nucleus of the "workers' autonomy" tendency, represented by Potere Operaio (Workers' Power) and Collettivo Politico Metropolitano (Metropolitan Political Collective), having come up against the institutional-political limits of a strategy based on the political potential of factory wage struggles, made a dramatic choice in favour of fighting for the militarisation of the movement. This similarly involved slogans like "overcoming the spontaneity of the autonomous mass movement" and "building the armed party". It involved staking everything on levels of organised militancy, professional cadres etc. This was to be a losing battle. But the main problem now is to grasp how and why the margins of the "movement" were so drastically curtailed, deprived of political space, while only hypotheses of party organisation survived in this period.

The Political Problems of the Movement and the Developing ‘Partyist’ Conceptions

In general we can say that historical models were taken up uncritically and assumed an a priori normative validity and importance. Following the wave of new political hypotheses that went well beyond the communist historical tradition, in 1968-69, we then saw a wholesale recovery and revival of Third Internationalist models and perspectives. The central problem was State terrorism; the problem of power, seen as the smashing of the State machine, further accentuated the classic Leninist features of organisation. This is true especially of the struggle to overthrow the Right-wing Andreotti-Malagodi Government up to 1972, which led to the maximum degree of convergence between the organisational strategy of the revolutionary Left groups and the institutional forces of anti-Fascism. The groups were in this process absorbed into the “party system”, to the extent of “crossing the parliamentary-electoral threshold”; leading to the creation of organisations such as DP (*Democrazia Proletaria*), or tactics of electoral support for the PCI, like *Lotta Continua*. But this already takes us into the second, post-1973 phase, which we shall be examining later.

A sort of imperfect Togliattian system was in operation in this first period: on the one hand, a strong presence in the streets, militant anti-Fascism, mass campaigns and demonstrations promoted by the groups; on the other, parliamentary pressure, but above all through institutions and the Press, by the PCI and PSI, to overthrow the terroristic blackmail of the DC Government and its allies. Even the initiatives of the Red Brigades (BR) in this period maintain an objective ambivalence between extreme forms of militant anti-Fascism (viewed with considerable tolerance by certain sectors of ex-partisans, veterans of the armed Resistance of the 1940s) and the building of an armed party, derived from within the “post-workerist” and insurrectionist perspectives of the “workers’ autonomy” current we have already referred to.

We can therefore distinguish the characteristics of the average type of militant formed in this phase of the struggle: a party cadre, with considerable organisational ability, activism and presence at all necessary levels, who developed certainly from his or her own situation of struggle, but who received an overall political framework from the “party school” and the myths of the organisation. It would be unfair to say simply that this implies the formation of alienated militants, expropriated of their own subjectivity. The positive characteristics of this period, the unceasing rhythm of campaigns and mobilisations, sometimes blind, but no less effective in the long run; the new, calculated, organised use of “direct action” in the street demonstrations and confrontations; the prompt response to provocations of the Right – all these activities established and imposed a terrain of mass political practice, which became a social structure, a class composition, even if the signs of its fragility became apparent in the second period.

The transition to this second period of the struggle must be first understood in terms of the changed relation between the revolutionary Left and the factory. This was not only due to the increased emphasis on territorial-community activism (see *Take Over the City* and similar slogans and projects of this phase). It was rather that the restoration of Third Internationalist models meant that the scientific Marxist concepts of the factory and the working class were lost sight of. The relation between revolutionary politics and the reality of the working class was mediated by one over-riding theme – that of restructuration. In other words, a defensive terrain, which not only accepted as given the fragmentation of the “mass worker” – the driving force of the class in the previous workers’ offensive – but made this fragmentation the key point of departure for organisation. This was a confusing period. The Left groups had no factory strategy; their militants were purged from the plants, either sacked (often for absenteeism), by leaving of their own accord, or taking shelter within the Unions. In some of the large working-class concentrations of the North, only a clandestine fraction was left to maintain a slender organisational network.

Not that the period 1969-73 was one of standstill as far as workers' demands were concerned – far from it. It was marked by intensive collective bargaining activity – probably the most intense since the War. Few were aware of the reconquest by the “party system” in the factories, precisely because this process was covered up by the pressure of Union bargaining. In some sectors, labour costs rose by 25% a year, not to mention the Union pressure for the *inquadramento unico* (unification of grading systems for workers and white collar staff) and on working conditions and environment. But this continuous bargaining activity tended to have a fragmenting effect politically: it tended to dissolve the political identity of the class, reducing it to its lowest common denominator as mere labour-power. It would be quite wrong to say that the presence of workers' political problems “diminished” in this period at all levels. The reality of the situation was rather that all the properties of the class which unify and define it as a political subject were now transferred to the organisations. The class remained as a subaltern element, as “material” for the party, in other words as labour-power. The spectre of the old separation between “economic” and “political” struggle returned to the scene. This meant a severe setback for the autonomy of the working class: a defeat of working-class science, of revolutionary theory.

A New Political Cycle of Struggles: The Generalisation of the Political Behaviour of the Mass Worker

But if the identity of the mass worker as political subject was now dead – long live the mass worker! A political cycle of struggles as deeply rooted and powerful as that which led from the mass confrontation of Piazza Statuto (Turin, 1961) to the generalised offensive of the Hot Autumn (1969) – throughout which the mass worker of large-scale industry had acted as the central driving force – could hardly be expected to disappear without a trace! It was bound to set in motion a whole series of secondary effects and irreversible mechanisms, imposing its specific hegemony on the composition of the entire class.

In fact there were plenty of signs of this. Besides the network of smaller factories which began to explode one after another, the rest of the labour force at all levels took the cue and began to organise and struggle along the same lines as the workers of the big factories. Apart from the affirmation of a similar model of political-trade union activity, we find parallel forms of collective behaviour and practices of struggle. The hegemony of the workers over salaried employees can be seen in the mass picketing by bank employees, including violent confrontations with the police and scabs (the police were by now being used regularly against pickets); or in the “internal marches” (characteristic form of mobilisation at FIAT) by Government employees at the Ministries. Not to mention certain more specific effects, such as the workers' use of labour tribunals. This began to provide certain levels of the magistracy with a platform to break away from the impasse of a purely juridical-formal battle for respect of labour codes and guarantees against the illegal practices of the judiciary – hence the emergence of a new working-class practice in jurisprudence.

Further, the struggle over health and safety at work provided a platform for doctors to break away from the corporate interests of the medical profession: hence the beginning of mass criticism of the medical profession and the medical-pharmaceutical power-bloc, which has been one of the major conquests of working-class hegemony at the institutional level. Class resistance to restructuring and technological innovation in the plants led engineers and technicians also to a critique of the organisation of machinery and plants from a working-class viewpoint. Finally, there was the unification of grading systems for staff and workers (staff status), together with the conquest of the “150 Hours” (workers' paid study-leave) conceded in the engineering workers' contract of 1972 and

subsequently generalised. Autonomous and distinct from both professional work-retraining schemes and trade union training courses, this latter victory reimposed a working-class, factory presence in the State schools and universities.

The arrival of the “150 Hours” workers on study-leave in the universities meant a radical change. The effects of freeing entry to the universities became macroscopic. Two new elements threw the old elite and academic forms into crisis: students of proletarian background/students who had been proletarianised, and the worker-students. There was also the generational factor – the youth enrolling in universities have behind them a High School movement, both compact and tested in mass activism in the streets. Those arriving from technical and commercial or accountancy schools come from a background of struggles around the relation between education and employment. The mass meeting (*assemblea*) remains the basis of political formation, but the political structure of the militants comes from the *servizio d'ordine* (the organisation of stewards, the “shock troops” at demonstrations), and from political organising in the community.

The Newly Defined Role of the University, and the Emergence of the Women’s Movement

This new generation of entrants to the University found nothing new or superior in terms of culture and means of political expression, than what had already been conquered in the High Schools, or through activity in political groups. In comparison, the University appeared as a lifeless, squalid, bureaucratic structure, which offered little. The old academic elite, despite the student revolt of 1968, had succeeded in coopting a new generation of young opportunist teachers. The picturesque arrogance of the older academics was being replaced by a new generation of mercurial and spent individuals. The “New Left” intellectuals of the 1968 vintage, and those formed in the so-called minority groups of the 'sixties, if not openly “sold out”, were either at the service of the Trade Union Left, or were practising a dual role of organisational militancy combined with “scientific” academicism. Any possibility of a new culture, a re-evaluation and relaunching of revolutionary theory and creation of new theoretical weapons that the University could offer, were openly discouraged both by the groups and by Left journalism and publishing. Hence the University was taken for what it was: a bureaucratic filter of social mobility and nothing more. The contents of academic culture were not challenged: instead there was a wholesale desertion of lectures and seminars. The struggle against selection of intake, as in 1968, no longer made sense, since the State itself had imposed massification and free entry. Selection now took place at other levels – at the level of income and needs: no longer by the vote of academic functionaries, but by the structural inadequacy of services. The impact of the crisis and the rise in the cost of living played the decisive role here.

This account takes us to the end of 1973, and the Oil Crisis, which we take as the conventional date for the opening of the second phase. But before we go on, we must turn to the decisive event which began to transform the conditions of the movement from 1970-71, still in the earlier phase: the birth of the feminist movement. This immediately posed a question of hegemony over the whole social fabric, hence was analogous, in its dimension and its claims, to the hegemony of the mass worker. The specific, autonomous interests of women, organised by women, not only directly challenge family relations of production. They also, by taking an autonomous political form as an independent feminist movement, involved a radical separation from the mediations of the “party system”, from Trade Union representation, but also, above all, from the revolutionary Left groups themselves. With women’s self-discovery and their claim to control their bodies, their own needs and desires, their subjectivity, we see the beginnings of a new critique of alienated militancy – one

of the key themes of the movement in the second phase – but also, and more fundamentally, the starting point for the general thematic of needs within the movement.

All this remained a latent tendency, however, until the beginning of the acute phase of the crisis in 1974-75. At the institutional level, this coincided with the defeat of the “strategy of tension”. Just at the point when the violence of the crisis against the composition of the class reached its apex, the Italian Left – including a large part of the extra-parliamentary groups – were celebrating their victory at the institutional level, considering their mission practically accomplished!

The Error of Mistaking the Appearance for the Substance of State Power

Here we see in striking form the precipitation of all the contradictions, above all the gap between “politics” and class reality, which marked the “imperfect Togliattian” situation we described above. The attention of the Left was focussed on the form of the State: but not the State form as measured or leveled against the autonomy of the working class. Rather, the State form was seen in itself, in its own autonomy, at the formal-political level only. The crisis of the Right-wing strategy of tension was mistakenly seen by the Left as the crisis of the State form. The forced abandonment by the DC Government of its underhand use of Fascist personnel and provocation was mistaken for the crisis of the regime. The temporary virulence of internal battles within the DC and the “separate bodies” of the State (secret services, security etc) was mistaken for a crisis of State command. This was to mistake the appearance for the substance of State power. Meanwhile, the real reconstruction of the “party system” proceeded from below; the form of the State had already penetrated the terrain of the factory, and by now only needed the ideology of the crisis to come out into the open, as a machine directly polarised against the interests of the working class.

Hence there was a temporary crisis at Government level, but combined with gradual “stabilisation” in the factories. The application of tough measures in high places; revelation of scandals, and intimidating Mafia-style behaviour at the highest level, exhibited in public; the corruption of the elite and the bureaucracy crudely exposed for the first time – but all in such a way as to demonstrate provocatively the privilege of impunity of the “party system”. Ministers, attorney generals, bankers, police chiefs, whose illegal and underhand practices were amply proved and discussed, never suffered any penalty in terms of loss of personal freedom or income. Thus the scandals of the regime (which the imbeciles of *Democrazia Proletaria*, along with others tied to the *bangdwagon* of the PCI, saw as the “definitive putrefaction of the system”) only served in fact as an element of intimidation and hence reinforcement of the State form based on the party system.

Meanwhile “tough measures” were being adopted in the factory! From 1974 onwards, the tempo of factory closures, sackings and layoffs gathered pace, eased by systematic recourse to the *cassa integrazione* (the State-employer fund to compensate for periods of layoff from work, in crisis-hit industries and sectors). The system of labour-contract legal guarantees, established thanks to the workers’ offensive of 1969, was not broken and remained intact. In other words, it was allowed to survive as a juridical-contractual framework. But the reality of “guaranteeism”, which does not depend on written statutes or labour contracts, but on the homogeneity and compactness of class organisation and the political network of class autonomy built in the factories in the preceding years – this was attacked by all means available.

As regards class subjectivity, which is our main focus in this article, a period of silence now sets in (apart from the well-known worsening of the conditions of work) – a silence in which we still find ourselves today. This occurred, in the absence of alternative political structures, with the decline of democratic trade union institutions. In the factory mass meetings, which became

more and more infrequent, the workers no longer speak. They suffer in silence the continuous hammering-home of the official trade union line. (“Things could get worse”; “We have to accept the reality of the situation”; “We must tighten our belts, accept certain sacrifices” etc). They close themselves off into an attitude of non-expression of their own needs, and stand by while vanguard militants are intimidated, purged or expelled from the factory with the open complicity – indeed active connivance – of union and party officials. While the purging of militants had previously been a creeping, silent process, with the transition to the second phase it becomes open and demonstrative: the political confrontation with the workers becomes a frontal attack, a determined effort by the “party system” to normalise the behaviour of the workers and their forms of struggle. Seen in this context, the advances made in the sphere of “civil rights” in this new phase must be seen as a diversion – although we should not underestimate their effects, in legitimating the women’s movement (and hence allowing it to advance on a broader political front) and in precipitating the crisis of the military institutions. Despite these positive aspects, however, there is no doubt that the macroscopic element of the period 1974-76 remains the inability of the workers’ struggle to break the equilibrium of the “party system” and destabilise its internal relations.

In this temporary blunting of the political impact of working-class struggle, a considerable role has been played by the decentralised political-administrative structure of regional governments and local authorities. Increasingly they have intervened as mediators and arbitrators in factory confrontations.

A Developing Class Composition: The Role of the Small Factory and the Disseminated Worker

The smaller firms and plants have a special importance, for the class subjectivity and type of struggle that they engender. At this level, of piecemeal blow against counterblow, closures and occupations, it is precisely this war of position that gives rise to the recompositional processes of the working class. It is still difficult to establish, but probably the small factory has provided the best terrain, the “entry hole” through which the mole has started to dig once again. Of course, small factories are not homogeneous among themselves, and in fact exhibit sharp differences and contrasts. For example: differences between low technological levels, antiquated levels of organisation, and big innovative tendencies; between situations of total market paralysis and situations offering possibilities of fresh market penetration; locally-oriented factories, and factories serving only an international market; firms that are totally dependent on the stranglehold of credit, and firms like the cooperatives which are free from bankers’ usury; from unionised firms to others (far greater in number) with no trade union organisation; from firms with a labour force which is marginal and underpaid, to those where it is highly paid and skilled; and finally, varying-sized factories where all these elements are combined under one roof. Precisely this level of dis-homogeneity means that the small-to-medium factory worker does not express a majoritarian social reference point for the class, whose demands and forms of struggle can be taken up at the general level of political objectives: furthermore, we cannot expect to see the kind of relationship (as with the large-scale factory) of mass vanguards capable of pulling behind them the whole of the movement.

In other words, in this case there is a lack of these political mechanisms that had marked the cycle of struggles of the mass worker. But this does not mean that a general political potential does not exist: here we find instead a set of recompositional mechanisms that start, precisely, from a base of dis-homogeneity.

Let’s begin with age: precisely because the small factory tends to use marginal labour-power,

the presence of minors and very young people, if not typical, is nevertheless very frequent, and it is from the small factories that perhaps the most solid wing of the movement of proletarian youth has been recruited. At the same time, since the small factories employ a considerable number of women workers, they have also provided a recruiting ground for a sizeable wing of the women's movement, with a particular awareness of the problems of material needs. In addition there is the question of the workforce involved in precarious work (*lavoro precario*), work in the home, illegal work (*lavoro nero*), etc: the crisis has swept away the dividing partitions between the various "industrial formations" and has created the phenomenon of the "disseminated worker" (*operaio disseminato*) (which can also be found in other specific epochs in the history of the Italian proletariat). In other words, the conscious dispersion of the labour force within a territorial dimension, in an intermediate condition between formal and real subjection to capital. This is a precise plan, put into operation against the political aggregation of the class. But, leaving aside these structural aspects, the big changes are to be seen in the subjectivity of the workers in the small factory, inasmuch as it is hard for them to apply organisation models and forms of struggle which really only apply in large-scale industry. Here we see the crisis in the trade-unionist style of operating that characterised the struggles of workers in the large factories. The transition whereby labour power becomes working class (a process which is guaranteed in the large factory by the very fact of massification) is a transition that the small-factory worker must win via political processes that are by no means "given". The practice of violence must make up for the lack of numbers and low level of massification. If the roots of direct-action armed workers' groups are to be found, historically, in the old "Stalingrads" of the working class, in political terms they are based on the standards of the small factory.

To sum up: the small factory has played a crucial role. It has provided a material terrain of recomposition for proletarian youth, for the women's movement, and for the struggle against overtime and illegal labour – and it has provided a channel of mediation between the behaviour of the disseminated worker and the behaviour of the workers based in the large industrial concentrations.

However, these positions regarding the small factory must not be taken in an "institutional" sense. In other words, the new class composition that emerges from the second phase has neither an institution to symbolise it, nor is it represented by a majority social figure. This becomes all the more evident if we examine the other large sector of recruitment – the service industries. Here we see familiar patterns repeating themselves. In all capitalist societies in the past 30 years, employment has uniformly stagnated in manufacturing and has increased in the services. However, what is not uniform is the level of wages within the respective service sectors, and the huge differences in levels of organisation and efficiency. Here, however, the problem is one of a particular political conjuncture. Namely: the unclear demarcation between the area of receivers of revenue and the area of services; the launching of the trade unions' reform programme after the Hot Autumn with the intention of diverting workers' pressure on the factory wage onto the indirect wage; the decentralisation of the functions of State administration: all these contribute to making the service sector a focal point for a particular set of political tensions. This becomes explosive when the idea of a right to an income becomes widespread, alongside the emerging political reality of the "new needs".

The Changing Position of Local Authority and Para-State Workers

The dominant fact in this situation is the increasing political pressure on the service sector, on the firms and agencies within that sector, and on the political and administrative institutions. This has built up through a whole range of subjective and structural pressures, all of which require a microscopic analysis. The fact of this pressure is the only element of homogeneity in the situation,

because when we look at the levels of organisation, or the levels of organic composition of capital, we find radical differences. On the one hand there are the examples of firms like SIP and ENEL (petrochemicals and electricity). Here we find ourselves in an area of large-scale technological innovation, involving huge expenditure, backed by banks and finance institutions (SIP is far and away the most indebted of all Italian concerns), accompanied by phenomena of violent restructuration. We also find ourselves in one of the heartlands of the working class (Sit-Siemens, Face Standard, Ansaldo Meccanica, Breda, ex-Pellizzari), and at the same time in an area where sub-contracting has created a large pool of casual labour (*forza-lavoro precario*) (for example, SIP's traveling workforce). The workers' struggles and forms of organisation in these areas have followed the cycles of the wider class struggle, but the fact that these firms are at the centre of fundamental decisions regarding the so-called "model of development" (eg the question of energy policy) means that the workers' demands tend to slip out of the traditional channels of collective bargaining and into political debate tout court.

The situation is similar as regards the credit institutions. The fact that we are dealing here with workers who are often regarded as a privileged sector of the workforce because of their relatively high wages, has not prevented their struggle from spreading to the point where it has found precise points of contact with the political form of the autonomy of the mass worker. In these areas the interlock with overall class composition has also been facilitated by the large numbers of workers from the credit institutions and from the service sector in general who have enrolled in the Universities. The fact that they are employed by interest-producing capital has allowed bank workers to grasp the way in which capital is managing the crisis, and the function of money within the crisis. However, here we still find ourselves within a framework of trade union control of the workforce.

The situation alters radically when we look at hospital workers, local authority workers and social service workers. Here control of the workforce is exercised directly by the "party-system". Here the "party system" is not able to delegate the basically political choices to "economic interests". It has to take initiatives directly at the level of the organisation of hierarchies and the organisation of work, at the level of cutting jobs and cutting labour costs, but above all in dealing with the growing demand for income and demand for services – ie dealing with the new class composition and the emerging system of "needs". This is the first test that the Communist Party has to face in its new role as the ruling party within local authorities. Certain institutions – the hospitals in particular – are exploding for the first time, uncovering conditions of work and wages that disappeared from industry years ago, as well as hierarchical structures that are inconceivable in this "age of egalitarianism". For the hospital workers in particular, CGIL leader Lama has reserved words even harsher than those he used on the students. The "party system" brought in the army to break their struggle. The logical sequence of clientelism – tertiary sector – subversion has been evoked to provide a basis whereby the institutional bloc can oppose the new types of struggles by the workers in the social services.

Transportation Workers, the Small Firm and Aspects of Decentralisation

The situation is similar in the case of the transport workers, the third big sector feeding into this new class composition. Once again the "party system" and the trade unions function as command over the labour force. The struggles of the railway workers were treated in the same harsh manner as those of the hospital workers, but the fact that the trade union in question has a long (and some would say glorious) historical tradition made it all the more striking, the way this Union was rejected when it tried to take control of the workforce and impose the politics of austerity. Whether

for good or ill, in the hospitals the autonomous struggle has also sparked a process of unionisation. on the railways, on the other hand, there has been a mass, conscious rejection of CGIL union membership. But here we are dealing with things that are well-known...

Less well-known, but infinitely more explosive, is the situation in road transport. Here we are faced with a mass of waged workers and independent operators equal to twenty Mirafioris rolled into one. The "objective" weight of this workforce is frightening, and it is perhaps the only section of the class today whose movements could paralyse the whole capitalist cycle. The strike of tanker drivers in the North-West gave a taste of this: the Communist Party, through the structure of the cooperatives, controls a fair slice of this sector. The tanker drivers' strike gave an indication of the possible levels of violence: 7-8,000 tyres slashed, according to trade union sources, within a very few days.

Here the "party system" (which, by the way, hurried to conclude the contract negotiations, despite the obvious desire of FIAT and the oil companies to provoke deadlock) made widespread use of the spectre of Chile, and once again repeated their operation of political marginalisation of the drivers' demands etc, in the same way as they had done for the railway workers, the hospital workers, and the social service and local authority workers.

Our account so far has left out the large number of workers in each of the above sectors who are employed by contractors and sub-contractors. Their numbers considerably increase the size of the workforce that is commanded either directly or indirectly by the "party system" (or, more precisely, by the Christian Democrats or the Communist Party). This network of contract labour brings us right to the heartlands of *lavoro nero* – in other words, that very wide area of waged labour where the system of trade union guarantees is either fragile or non-existent. But is this network only characteristic of the State, local authority and service sectors? Far from it. It is the structure of the firm itself (*impresa*) that is now being dissolved, as a means of producing commodities; the firm remains merely as chief clerk, as mere administration of decentralised labour; in fact, the firm dissolves itself as a subject or protagonist of conflict, as an institution of the class struggle. The firm is the fulcrum of the processes of tertiarisation. How can we speak of rigidity of the labour-market outside of this institutional break-up? The chain of infinite decentralisation of production breaks the rigidities of age and sex, of geographical location, of social background etc, and all this is a weighty factor in fusing the new class composition.

This chain of infinite decentralisation is one of the more "progressive" elements of capitalism today; it is a far more powerful weapon of massification than the assembly line. The factory, as an institution that is increasingly "guaranteed" and "protected", was becoming socially and politically isolated. It did not allow entry to young people, to women, to students; it imposed its hierarchies and its compartmentalisations on the whole of society; it played a normative role as a complete, perfect social form. It has become necessary to encircle and envelop the factory, and this chain of infinite decentralisation offers us the material grounds for doing it. The process of decentralisation has created large numbers of openings into which the women, the young people, the students, the laid-off workers and the redundant workers have inserted themselves, taking on the aspect of waged workers. And in the meantime thousands of waged workers have been flowing out of the factories and into the Universities, taking on the status of students. These are both movements in the area of political demography, because the status of the waged worker and the status of the student have a precise legitimisation within the institutional conflict-system in our country. The whole mechanism of the reproduction of classes had the institution of the factory as its bedrock (with the development of a system of trade-union guarantees, a "working-class aristocracy" was supposed to be reproduced in the factory) and the University as an institution of social promotion (where an anti-worker middle

class was supposed to be created) – but this mechanism has exploded.

The Decentralisation of the System of Struggles. The Politics of “Personal Life”

So far we have shown that the system of decentralisation has allowed a “mixed” labour force to be absorbed within the wage relation, and that the processes of tertiarisation of the firm have, in turn, driven thousands of waged workers to become students. Having shown that these drives have conferred a new political legitimation on all those involved, we need not list the thousand-and-one positions that the students have taken up or can take up within the opportunities of wage labour that the system of decentralisation offers. These thousands of student-workers have brought a new political dimension to the condition of waged labour in which they find themselves, and it has proved possible to create a mutual strengthening of isolated struggles, even in situations where trade unionism is weak and where there are few situations of struggle. The University has been used as a focal point. Even this “squalid bureaucratic ante-chamber” has proved capable of becoming something different – a meeting point, an aggregation point for a system of struggles that is itself also infinitely decentralised. Meanwhile, after years of waiting, the old mole of the student struggle has also started digging again, on issues like canteens, housing, transport, and finally on course contents, exams, and voting rights. The proletarian (and proletarianised) student sectors were able to fuse themselves with the whole arc of struggles that the crisis was setting in motion.

But our analysis of these structural factors will be ineffective unless we can combine it with an analysis of the huge transformation taking place in the sphere of “personal life”. This obviously starts from the breakdown of sexual relations brought on by feminism. It then widens to involve all the problems of controlling one’s own body and the structures of perceptions, emotions and desires. This is not just a problem of “youth culture”. It has working-class antecedents in the cycle of struggles of 1968-69. The defence of one’s own physical integrity against being slaughtered by line-speeds and machinery, against being poisoned by the environment etc, on the one hand is a way of resisting the depreciation of the exchange value of one’s labour-power and the deterioration of its use value, but at the same time it is a way of re-appropriating one’s own body, for the free enjoyment of bodily needs. Here too there is a homogeneity, not a separation, between the behaviour of the young people, the women and the workers.

The question of drugs now arises. Control of drug usage is being reappropriated by the institutions of the political cycle. No sooner have young people had a taste of soft drugs, giving them a first-hand taste of how much this society has robbed them of their perceptive potential, than the heroin multinational decides to step in and impose hard drugs. A space of political confrontation opens up, between use value (self-managed, within certain limits) and exchange value of drugs, and this involves organisation and instances of armed self-defence. Nor is the mechanism of the production of new needs the exclusive prerogative of the “liberation movements”... it has its roots in the “We Want Everything” of the Mirafiori workers in the Summer of 1969. The “Italian Utopia” has a solid working-class stamp, which no theorists of an American-style “movement” – ghettoised and self-sufficient – will be able to erase.

The Crisis of Political Forms. The Meaning of the Area of Autonomy

As we have seen, the reconquest of “personal life” has also dealt a death-blow to the organisations of the revolutionary Left. But the roots of their organisational breakdown do not lie only in questions of sexual relations, of alienating hierarchies, the denial of subjectivity etc: they lie in precise, documentable errors of political choice, mistaken theories of organisation. For example, the current

concept of power, which has been based on the old political cycle (struggle/party/transition/civil war/state power). In other words, a projection into the future, rather than a lived experience within the liberated spaces of the present. This error turns into parody when the groups all troop down into the electoral arena. The rotten institutional forms of politics, eaten away from the inside and abandoned by the more aware elements, become a form of oppression.

However, it would be wrong to theorise on the one hand an irrational society made up of pure behaviours, opposing, on the other, a society structured by logical schemas. What we have are hidden circuits involving particular groups, which then evolve into particular sets of results; there is in fact a conscious practice of the irrational, as a destruction of the bridging elements of language, communication and mediation. In short, any separation between the “post-political” (the area of instinct, of the irrational, the personal and the private) and the political cycle is unacceptable. It is not possible to confine the new subjectivity within the terms of youth counterculture, or to consider it an exclusive prerogative of the women. Current attempts to create an opposition between the liberation movement and the political cycle are false – as false as the theory that defines the new class composition as being made up of the unemployed and the marginalised sectors. The reality is that politics as a form has undergone a critique, on the basis of a battle between political lines, and this in turn has allowed the emergence of new organisations, which have been politically legitimated by their presence within those class nuclei outlined above.

The explosion of 1977, with the occupation of University facilities, was a violent confrontation between the State-form and the new political class composition. For a while this new class composition met and based itself in the University, taking it as a material base where different needs, different class segments, social groups, political groups and disseminated groups could come together. The University as an institution became a struggle-base, capable of representing all the various partial programmes of the new class composition.

The new emergence of the women’s movement and the youth movement deepens the split with the organisations making up *Democrazia Proletaria* (Proletarian Democracy), but the real origins of this split are to be found in the political disagreements voiced by the emerging forces of the organised area of autonomy (*l'autonomia organizzata*), in particular the groups representing Rome, the Po Valley and the Milano-Sesto-Bergamo axis. Now, if anything legitimated them as a “leading minority” in the very first phase of the occupation of the faculties, it was their relationship with the new class composition, with the service-sector proletariat in a big tertiary city like Rome, with the network of factory vanguards in the industrial zone between Milan and Bergamo, and with the needs of proletarian students and geographically disseminated workers in the Po Valley. The fact that they understood and had subjectively anticipated mass behaviours that were not locatable in the schemas of the wave of contestation in 1968, nor in those of the Hot Autumn – that fact allowed the people of the “organise autonomy” – albeit for a brief period – to carry forward a programme that matched the developing class composition. The relation between these autonomist fractions and the wider movement was on a par with the relation between the anarchist groups and the masses in the Sorbonne in May '68. The ability to match class composition with the political programme means the ability to practise the art of politics (or, more often, plain good sense), in order to pull together the vanguard and the average, the organisation and the movement.

But instead, with incredible speed, the hoary old questions started coming out: should the organisation, with its programme and its plans, march over the corpse of the movement; should the programme be external to and counterposed to the class composition? The echoes of the clashes in Bologna had hardly died away when everyone whipped out their Lenin masks from behind their backs – in particular the Workers’ Autonomy tendency (*Autonomia Operaia*) in the North.

Meanwhile, in the actual struggle, important things were happening. The current interpretations of them (both those of the DP tendency and those of the autonomy tendency) are either wrong, or only half right. Particularly as regards the internal mechanics of the events of Bologna.

The main problem bringing about this split between class composition and the programme is the question of the “combat party” (*partito combattente*). When some fractions of the “organised autonomy” decide to force the pace on this front (with considerable internal differences between those who base themselves on the need for self-defence, and those who argue for a qualitative advance in organisation), not only does the DP front rebuild itself (Milan provides one example of this), but we also find a widespread and increasing resistance on the part of those “libertarian” elements who do not accept a re-introduction of voluntarist practices.

It was no accident that it fell to fractions of the organised autonomy to lead the first phase of the struggle. Their initial hegemony over the movement derived from their having understood and anticipated the forms of political behaviour that were characteristic of the new class composition; from the ability to read parts of the programme within the masses themselves; in other words, knowing how to present themselves not as a “private” thing, but as a “social” expression, a tendency of a growing movement, rather than a choice wholly confined within the logic of the self-reproduction of a political group. The developing critique of the traditional forms of politics (in particular of the “party form”) has sharpened the sensibilities of comrades into an almost neurotic ability to intuit when particular choices and actions function “for all” and when they are only private and personal. Forcing the pace on the question of the “combat party” has set in motion all these mechanisms, and has opened up more contradictions within the movement than it has in the State apparatus! But then this is precisely the point: with this cycle of struggles, the State-form has undergone an evolution. It is perfectly clear that it has been proceeding full-tilt along the road of unifying the “party system”, and that law and order has been the main track along which this process of unification has passed. However, within the “party system” there have been different approaches (or perhaps a division of roles?) on how to proceed with a strengthening of the State-form.

Practical Experiments in a New State-Form

The Christian Democrats have taken the crude line of polishing up existing privileges of the forces of law and order (police laws of arrest etc), as well as introducing new rules and regulations. The effect of this is to confer the whole operation of deterrence onto the repressive apparatus, with the intention that, having dealt with the “autonomists” they will then be able to move against the wider movement of opposition. Certainly the DC has still done this after due consultation with the other parties (ie, respecting the rules of their joint project, and accepting the inevitable delays and discussions arising), but nevertheless the DC still bases itself on the State as an apparatus: a separate machine, a “special body”, to be used as a means of repression in given emergency circumstances, and in the meantime it leaves the “daily repression” to the capitalist form of command over the factory and over disseminated labour.

The Communist Party in Bologna, on the other hand, has developed and experimented practically with a more mature State-form, a form which is more in line with mass social-democracy in a period of transition. A State-form in which it is the masses themselves who act as judge and jury, judging who is deviant and who is not, who is productive and who is not, what is socially dangerous and who is not. Now it is to be the factory mass meetings that expel the extremist; the mass tenants’ meeting that decides to expel the young hooligan; and the college assembly to expel the “undesirable” student with his pistol and iron bar. Of course, the instances I am thinking of

have been extreme cases – but the fact that this State-form is being tried out on the “autonomists” as guinea pigs does not lessen the marginalising potential of such a State-form within a framework of developing austerity, of the “politics of sacrifice” and of money being given hand over fist to capitalist enterprises. Once you have the collective acting as judge and jury, then the institutional forms of the law (wigs and robes etc) have only a ratifying function: they take delivery of the hostage, the tumour that has been driven out of the otherwise healthy body. The State-form appears as a kind of immunising process of civil society. This is a huge step forward – it is a moment of “socialisation of the State”, which would be innovative were it not happening within a framework of a freezing of the class power balance, with a restoration of capitalist control at all levels, and a general amnesty for all the criminals, past and present, belonging to the apparatus of clientelism, corruption and repression. At the level of power-institutions it is undoubtedly a further element contributing to the stickiness of the situation, but at the same time we must understand its “progressive” character. It transcends two aspects of the present State-form: its aspect as a “party system”, and its aspect as a bureaucratic-repressive apparatus, both of which are separate from and hostile to civil society. It is an infinitely more advanced form, a form which, among other things, has no need to break up the present institutional apparatus or purge it by substituting more democratic personnel... This State-form does more than that. It overturns the relationship between civil society and the apparatus. It appropriates the qualitative function of the judiciary, and leaves the apparatus with the quantitative translation, in terms of the penalties to be imposed. Henceforth it is civil society, the collectivity, which fixes the norm and formulates the sentence; while the apparatus is left with the technical task of punishment.

All this presents enormous problems for the legitimisation of political actions, inasmuch as organisation is obliged to measure itself day by day against the new class composition; and must find its political programme only in the behaviour of the class, and not in some set of statutes; and thus must practise not political clandestinity, but its opposite. Those who practise technical clandestinity generally do not even see this State-form. They continue to relate to the State apparatuses, and by focussing all their attention on them, they then find themselves separated from the mass movement. On the other hand, those who choose political clandestinity – ie refuse to seek or create a base for criticism and legitimisation of actions – not only undergo that same segregation from the mass movement, but are also smashed by the apparatus, because they do not have the defences and the weapons possessed by those in technical clandestinity.

Now, while it is true that the PCI has proposed (and in some instances put into effect) this new, more advanced form of the State, as an experiment, in actual fact it has oscillated between this type of “political prevention” of subversive behaviour, and a complete delegation of repression to the State apparatus. In my own opinion, the first option carried far more weight, and in this sense I find tiresome and also incorrect the references that are presently being made to “a new Prague” or “a new Chile”. But what we must clarify is the extent to which this proposition of a “social” State-form has met and will meet resistance and refusal at the various levels of the present class composition.

Leaving aside the resistance that it has met even among particular sectors of the judiciary itself (ie in a fraction of the apparatus itself), it has not been allowed to pass at the average level of class composition (I underline average). Not only because it aims to transfer to civil society only some (incidentally, the most odious) prerogatives of the State, and not other more attractive ones (like control of resources, for example). But also because it deludes itself into imagining that it can inject people with an abstract sense of the State, whereas in fact the State that people understand is this State – ie a State of given power relations and value systems that the working class started

to unhinge in 1969, and which the “party system”, with the crisis, has not only succeeded in setting back on its feet, but has also taken over as its own. The State-form is not a juridical principle, nor an abstract norm, but a formation that is historically determinate.

Towards a Mobilisation of the Entire Mass of Disseminated Labour

The theory that the University has functioned as a point of aggregation for the movement runs alongside a theory regarding the figure of the unemployed intellectual (or rather the intellectual unemployed), who has been taken, uncritically, as the most representative figure of the movement. The theory is that the exclusion of the intellectual unemployed from the labour market puts them on a par with other marginalised sectors, for whom the intellectual unemployed then act as a voice. I have already stated my complete disagreement with this kind of interpretation. The University was taken by the current class composition as a point of aggregation, more for reasons of the political forms of the struggle (ie for certain levels of violence and power) than for the fact that it is a factory producing unemployed intellectuals; it was taken up because it put an end to this process of the marginalisation of demands, subjective behaviours and organisation. But once again we must go beyond the University, both as a base for the movement and as a point of aggregation, in order to identify the channels that can bring about a mobilisation of the entire mass of disseminated labour – ie in order to provide a way into the factory that produces relative surplus value. For this reason I have taken pains to emphasise the question of precarious labour, together with the system of decentralisation of production, and that social area where the protected system of trade union “guarantees” of wages and conditions has entered into crisis. In order to make this transition it is vital that we first reject the “rhetoric of poverty” – moral protests on behalf of the poor. Instead, we should once again ask ourselves whether it is possible to think in terms of “mass objectives” of the type which characterised the anti-authoritarianism of 1968 (the FIAT workers’ demand for “Grade 2 for all”, which led into the egalitarianism of the demands put forward in the Hot Autumn of 1969).

Such a proposal cannot be simply written off as a step backwards in collective bargaining, that would prepare the ground for a new social contract between the Government and the unions. It would be absurd to reject it out of hand, for the simple reason that such new objectives would carry within them the representative weight of the infinite political creativity that has emerged in these past few years. Rather, the bigger problem is how we are going to find the point where such a project can be applied – in short, to choose the “new Mirafioris” out of all the various “driving sectors” of the so-called tertiary sector. More specifically, out of those sectors which function as a connecting link between the production of absolute surplus value and the production of relative surplus value – like, for example, the cycle of transportation. Moreover, even in the simple extension of the rigidity of labour (even in its form as a system of trade union guarantism) to *lavoro nero*, subcontracted work etc, would have the effect of forcing the factory struggle to take a leap forward. In short, we are looking for the social channels whereby we could break the encirclement that is currently under way, and prevent the movement dispersing itself into a thousand decentralised moments of struggle – a new, long Purgatory of endemic struggles. We have to find something which can function in the same way as did the strikes over pensions and the strikes over wage-zones did, in relation to the workers’ cycle of struggles in 1968-69.

This approach will be branded as “economism” and “collective bargainism” by all and sundry. It will be accused of lack of imagination, in putting forward mechanisms that are dead and buried. But let’s move gently. The State-form which presents itself today has its origins in the ideology of

the crisis and in the austerity programme that this has brought about. The ideology has provided the grounds for establishing the new, tighter relations between the parties. It is the historical basis of the Historic Compromise. It is the justification of the parties' powers of marginalisation. To succeed in overthrowing all this would be no small matter. It would mean not a return to the old conflictual form of the mediations of the party system, but restoring the conflict between the "grass roots" and the new relationship between a socialised State-form and the production of capital. All the more so, since Jimmy Carter's imperialism – unlike the obtuse accountants of the IMF – has understood that in Italy the system of values and behaviours to which the combination of austerity measures and law and order has to be applied, is stronger than it appears. And therefore it's a good investment to release huge amounts of money (this is Carter's current inclination), and inject huge amounts of "command-money" through the big, private, international banking system. Let us start to turn this command into money-as-money – to transform this measure of power-over-others'-labour into power-over-our-own-needs, power over our own spaces of organisation and culture, a driving-spring for the new development of a new class composition. It is time that we take back from the "party system" their residual powers over the reproduction of the classes, so that we can start to determine this reproduction from the base, in such a way as to guarantee the value-systems and the political behaviours that the new class composition has legitimated in the struggles of these past months.

Week 14

Eclipse of the Worker's Movement

The recent decades have seen profound changes in labor and the larger economy, continuing to the present. The percentage of workers working in industry and agriculture is declining, and the percentage in services is increasing. Job growth, anemic as it may be, is largely in part-time work. Rates of profitability are decreasing and more capital is moving into finance, away from the real economy. Austerity has taken hold of much of the world.

Voting patterns, too, have been disrupted, as economic class consciousness has eroded. Would-be proletarians often no longer see themselves as 'workers' primarily, but associate themselves more strongly with a variety of other identities.

Many of the states calling themselves socialist have turned capitalist, either by collapse of their governments – as in the case of the USSR and Yugoslavia – or by adopting policy that has little difference with capitalist economies – notably, China.

These changes arguably undermine the premises on which traditional Left political strategy is based. An essay by a contemporary political scientist which attempts to take up this question is this week's reading: Adam Przeworski's *Social Democracy as a Historical Phenomenon*.

The Eley chapters for this week are 23, 24 and 25.

14.1 Adam Przeworski, Social Democracy as a Historical Phenomenon (1980)

Not to repeat past mistakes: the sudden resurgence of a sympathetic interest in Social Democracy is a response to the urgent need to draw lessons from the history of the socialist movement. After several decades of analyses worthy of an ostrich, some rudimentary facts are finally being admitted. Social Democracy has been the prevalent manner of organization of workers under capitalism. Reformist parties have enjoyed the support of workers. Perhaps even more: for better or worse, Social Democracy is the only political force of the Left that can demonstrate an extensive record of reforms in favour of the workers. Any movement that seeks to transform historical conditions operates under these very conditions. The movement for socialism develops within capitalism and faces definite choices that arise from this very organization of society. These choices have been threefold: (1) whether to seek the advancement of socialism through the political institutions of the capitalist society or to confront the bourgeoisie directly, without any mediation; (2) whether

to seek the agent of socialist transformation exclusively in the working class or to rely on multi- and even supra-class support; and (3) whether to seek improvements, reforms, within the confines of capitalism or to dedicate all efforts and energies to its complete transformation.

Social democrats choose to participate, to seek supra-class alliances, and to struggle for reforms. Yet these decisions are not independent of each other. What is crucial to understand is the development of social democracy as a process: the manner in which the response to any one of these alternatives opens and closes the subsequent choices. For it may be that any movement that chooses to participate in bourgeois institutions, and specifically in elections, must seek support for socialist transformation beyond the working class and must struggle for all improvements that are possible in the short run without regard for ultimate consequences. Are the decisions to participate and the strategy of supra-class appeal inextricably connected? Is the orientation toward immediate reforms a necessary consequence of broadening the class base? Is an electoral party that would be based exclusively on working class support and dedicated exclusively to ultimate goals even possible? These are the kinds of questions that need to be answered if we are to draw lessons from the social democratic experience. What we need to know is the logic of choices faced by any movement for socialism within capitalist society: the historical possibilities that are opened and closed as each choice is made.

The Decision to Participate

The reason why involvement in bourgeois politics has never ceased to evoke controversy is that the very act of “taking part” in this system shapes the movement for socialism and its relation to workers as a class. The recurrent question is whether involvement in bourgeois institutions can result in socialism, or must strengthen the capitalist order. Is it possible for the socialist movement to find a passage between the “two reefs” charted by Rosa Luxemburg: “abandonment of the mass character or abandonment of the final goals”? Participation in electoral politics is necessary if the movement for socialism is to find mass support among workers, yet this participation seems to obstruct the attainment of final goals. Working for today and working toward tomorrow appear as contrasting horns of a dilemma.

Participation imprints a particular structure upon the organization of workers as a class. These effects of participation upon internal class relations have been best analysed by Luxemburg: “the division between political struggle and economic struggle and their separation is but an artificial product, even if historically understandable, of the parliamentary period. On the one hand, in the peaceful development, ‘normal’ for the bourgeois society, the economic struggle is fractionalized, disaggregated into a multitude of partial struggles limited to each firm, to each branch of production. On the other hand, the political struggle is conducted not by the masses through direct action, but, in conformity with the structure of the bourgeois state, in the representative fashion, by the pressure exercised upon the legislative body.”

The first effect of “the structure of bourgeois state” is thus that wage-earners are formed as a class in a number of independent and often competitive organizations, most frequently as trade-unions and political parties, but also as cooperatives, neighbourhood associations, clubs, etc. One characteristic feature of capitalist democracy is the individualization of class relations at the level of politics and ideology. People who are capitalists or wage-earners within the system of production all appear in politics as undifferentiated “individuals” or “citizens”. Hence, even if a political party succeeds in forming a class on the terrain of political institutions, economic and political organizations never coincide. A multiplicity of unions and parties represent different interests and compete

with each other. Moreover, while the class base of unions is confined to those who are more or less permanently employed, political parties which organize wage-earners must also mobilize people who are not members of unions. Hence there is a permanent tension between the narrower interests of unions and the broader interests represented by parties.

The second effect is that relations within the class become structured as relations of representation. Parliament is a representative institution: it seats individuals, not masses. A relation of representation is thus imposed upon the class by the very nature of capitalist democratic institutions. Masses do not act directly in defence of their interests; they delegate this defence. This is true of unions as much as of parties: the process of collective bargaining is as distant from the daily experience of the masses as elections. Leaders become representatives. Masses represented by leaders: this is the mode of organization of the working class within capitalist institutions. In this manner participation demobilizes the masses.

The organizational dilemma extends even further. The struggle for socialism inevitably results in the *embourgeoisement* of the socialist movement: this is the gist of Robert Michels' classical analysis. The struggle requires organization; it demands a permanent apparatus, a salaried bureaucracy; it calls for the movement to engage in economic activities of its own. Hence socialist militants inevitably become bureaucrats, newspaper editors, managers of insurance companies, directors of funeral parlours, and even *Parteibudiger* – party bar keepers. All of these are petty bourgeois occupations. "They impress," Michels concluded, "...a markedly petty bourgeois stamp." As a French dissident wrote recently, "The working class is lost in administering its imaginary bastions. Comrades disguised as notables occupy themselves with municipal garbage dumps and school cafeterias. Or are these notables disguised as comrades? I no longer know."

A party that participates in elections must forsake some alternative tactics: this is the frequently diagnosed tactical dilemma. As long as workers did not have full political rights, no choice between insurrectionary and parliamentary tactics was necessary. Indeed, political rights could be conquered by those who did not have them only through extraparliamentary activities. César de Paepe, the founder of the Parti Socialiste Brabançon, wrote in 1877 that "in using our constitutional right and legal means at our disposal we do not renounce the right to revolution". This statement was echoed frequently, notably by Engels in 1895. Alex Danielsson, a Swedish left-wing socialist, maintained in a more pragmatic vein that Social Democrats should not commit themselves to "a dogma regarding tactics that would bind the party to act according to the same routine under all circumstances". That the mass strike should be used to achieve universal (and that meant male) suffrage was not questioned, and both the Belgian and Swedish parties led successful mass strikes that resulted in extensions of suffrage.

Yet as soon as universal suffrage was obtained, the choice between the "legal" and the "extraparliamentary" tactics had to be made. J. McGurk, the Chairman of the Labour Party, put it sharply in 1919: "We are either constitutionalists or we are not constitutionalists. If we are constitutionalists, if we believe in the efficacy of the political weapon (and we do, or why do we have a Labour Party?) then it is both unwise and undemocratic because we fail to get a majority at the polls to turn around and demand that we should substitute industrial action." The turning point in the tactics of several parties occurred after the failures of general strikes organized around economic issues. While strikes oriented toward suffrage had been generally successful, the use of mass strikes for economic goals resulted in political disasters in Belgium in 1902, Sweden in 1909, France in 1920, Norway in 1921, and Great Britain in 1926. All these strikes were defeated; in the aftermath trade-union membership was decimated and repressive legislation was passed. These common experiences of defeat and repression directed socialist parties toward an almost exclusive reliance on electoral

tactics. Electoral participation was necessary to protect the movement from repression: this was the lesson drawn by socialist leaders. As Kautsky wrote already in 1891, "The economic struggle demands political rights and these will not fall from heaven."

To win votes of people other than workers, particularly the petty bourgeoisie, to form alliances and coalitions, to administer the government in the interest of workers, a party cannot appear to be "irresponsible", to give any indication of being less than whole-hearted about its commitment to the rules and the limits of the parliamentary game. At times the party must even restrain its own followers from actions that would jeopardize electoral progress. Moreover, a party oriented toward partial improvements, a party in which leader-representatives lead a petty bourgeois life style, a party that for years has shied away from the streets cannot "pour through the hole in the trenches", as Gramsci put it, even when this opening is forged by a crisis. "The trouble about the revolutionary left in stable industrial societies," observed Eric Hobsbawm, "is not that its opportunities never came, but that the normal conditions in which it must operate prevent it from developing the movements likely to seize the rare moments when they are called upon to behave as revolutionaries... Being a revolutionary in countries such as ours just happens to be difficult."

This dilemma became even more acute when democracy – representative democracy characteristic of bourgeois society – ceased to be merely a tactic and was embraced as the basic tenet of the future socialist society. Social democratic parties recognized in political democracy a value that transcends different forms of organization of production. Jean Jaurès claimed that: "The triumph of socialism will not be a break with the French Revolution but the fulfillment of the French Revolution in new economic conditions." Eduard Bernstein saw in socialism simply "democracy brought to its logical conclusion", and ever since then the recurrent theme of social democracy has been precisely the notion of "extending" the democratic principle from the political to the social, in effect principally economic, realm. Representative democracy became for social democrats simultaneously the means and the goal, the vehicle for socialism and the political form of the future socialist society, simultaneously the strategy and the programme, instrumental and prefigurative.

This commitment made, however, even more crucial the question whether, as Harold Laski put it, capitalist democracy will "allow its electorate to stumble into socialism by the accident of the verdict at the polls". The most important reservation toward an exclusive commitment to electoralism stemmed from the tenuous nature of bourgeois legality. Little is to be gained by interpreting and reinterpreting every word Marx wrote about bourgeois democracy for the simple reason that Marx himself, and the people who led the newly founded parties into electoral battles, were not quite certain what to expect of electoral competition. The main question – one which history never resolved because it cannot be resolved once and for all – was whether the bourgeoisie would respect its own legal order in case of an electoral triumph of socialism. If socialists were to use the institution of suffrage – established by the bourgeoisie in its struggle against absolutism – to win elections and to legislate a society toward socialism, would the bourgeoisie revert to illegal means to defend its interests? This is what happened in France in 1851, and it seemed likely that it would happen again. But on several occasions Marx entertained the possibility that in England or in Holland counter-revolution would not occur if workers won the majority in the parliament. Thus, the essential question facing socialist parties was whether, as Hjalmar Branting posed it in 1886, "the upper class [would] respect popular will *even when it demanded the abolition of its own privileges*". Sterky, the leader of the left wing of the Swedish party, was among those who took a clearly negative view: "Suppose that ... the working class could send a majority to the legislature; not even by doing this would it obtain power. One can be sure that the capitalist class would then take care not to continue along a parliamentary course but would instead resort to bayonets." This

was eventually the position defended by Luxemburg in 1900. No one could be completely certain: according to Salvadori, Kautsky wobbled each time he approached this question. Austrian Socialists promised in their Linz programme of 1926 to “govern in strict accordance with the rules of the democratic state”, but they still felt compelled to warn that “should the bourgeoisie by boycotting revolutionary forces attempt to obstruct the social change which the labour movement in assuming power is pledged to carry out, then social democracy will be forced to employ dictatorial means to break such resistance.” The main doubt about electoral participation was whether revolution would not be necessary in any case, as August Bebel put it in 1905, as “as a purely defensive measure, designed to safeguard the exercise of power legitimately acquired through the ballot.” Dictatorship of the proletariat, and revolutionary violence, might be necessary even if the party adhered strictly to its electoral commitment. Tactical dualism could not be easily foresaken.

Hence social democrats faced a dilemma, dramatized by Gay in his biography of Bernstein. “Is democratic socialism, then, impossible? Or can it be achieved only if the party is willing to abandon the democratic method temporarily to attain power by violence in the hope that it may return to parliamentarism as soon as control is secure? Surely this second alternative contains tragic possibilities: a democratic movement that resorts to authoritarian methods to gain its objective may not remain a democratic movement for long. Still, the first alternative – to cling to democratic procedures under all circumstances – may doom the party to continual political impotence.”

Social Democracy’s Forward March

In spite of all the ambivalence, in spite of the pressure of short-term preoccupations, socialists entered into bourgeois politics to win elections, to obtain an overwhelming mandate for revolutionary transformations, and to legislate the society into socialism. This was their aim and this was their expectation.

Electoral participation was based on the belief that democracy is not only necessary but that it is sufficient for reaching socialism. “If one thing is certain,” Engels wrote in 1891 (a letter that was to meet with Lenin’s acute displeasure), “it is that our Party and the working class can only come to power under the form of democratic republic. This is even the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Jaurès saw in democracy “the largest and most solid terrain on which the working class can stand ... the bedrock that the reactionary bourgeoisie cannot dissolve without opening fissures in the earth and throwing itself into them”. Millerand was, as always, most incisive: “To realize the immediate reforms capable of relieving the lot of the working class, and thus fitting it to win its own freedom, and to begin, as conditioned by the nature of things, the socialization of the means of production, it is necessary and sufficient for the socialist party to endeavour to capture the government through universal suffrage.”

Socialists entered elections because they were concerned about immediate improvements of workers’ conditions. Yet they also entered in order to bring about socialism. Was this divergence between cause and purpose a symptom of rationalization? Was the pathos of final goals just a form of self-deception?

Such questions are best left for psychologists to resolve. But one thing is certain. Those who led socialist parties into electoral battles believed that dominant classes can be “beaten at their own game”. Socialists were deeply persuaded that they would win election, that they would obtain for socialism the support of an overwhelming numerical majority. They put all of their hopes and their efforts into electoral competition because they were certain that electoral victory was within reach. Their strength was in numbers, and elections are an expression of numerical strength. Hence,

universal suffrage seemed to guarantee socialist victory, if not immediately then certainly within the near future. Revolution would be made at the ballot box. Among the many expressions of this conviction is the striking apologia delivered by Engels in 1895: "The German workers ... showed the comrades in all countries how to make use of universal suffrage... With the successful utilization of universal suffrage ... an entirely new method of proletarian struggle came into operation, and this method quickly developed even further. It was found that state institutions, in which the rule of the bourgeoisie is organized, offer the working class still further opportunities to fight these very state institutions." And Engels offered a forecast: "If it [electoral progress] continues in this fashion, by the end of the century we shall ... grow into the decisive power in the land, before which all other powers will have to bow, whether they like it or not."

The grounds for this conviction were both theoretical and practical. Already in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels described socialism as the movement of "the immense majority". In an 1850 article on "The Chartists" in the New York *Daily Tribune* and then again in 1867 in the Polish emigre newspaper *Glos Wolny*, Marx repeated that "universal suffrage is the equivalent of political power for the working class of England, where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population..." Kautsky's *The Class Struggle*, probably the most influential theoretical statement of the early socialist movement, maintained that the proletariat already constituted the largest class "in all civilized countries". And even if the first electoral battles would not end in triumph, even if the proletariat was not yet the majority, electoral victory seemed only a matter of time because capitalism was swelling the ranks of the proletarians. The development of factory production and its corollary concentration of capital and land were leading rapidly to proletarianization of craftsmen, artisans, merchants, and small agricultural proprietors. Even "the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science" were being converted into proletarians, according to *The Communist Manifesto*. This growth of the number of people who sold their labour power for a wage was not accidental, temporary, or reversible: it was viewed as a necessary feature of capitalist development. Hence, it was just a question of time before almost everyone, "all but a handful of exploiters", would become proletarians. Socialism would be in the interest of almost everyone, and the overwhelming majority of the people would electorally express their will for socialism. A young Swedish theoretician formulated this syllogism as follows in 1919: "The struggle for the state is political. Its outcome is therefore to a very great extent contingent upon the possibility open to society's members – whose proletarianism has been brought about by the capitalist process – to exercise their proper influence on political decision-making. If democracy is achieved, the growth of capitalism means a corresponding mobilization of voices *against* the capitalist system itself. Democracy therefore contains an automatically operative device that heightens the opposition to capitalism in proportion to the development of capitalism."

Indeed, while those who eventually became communists saw in the Russian Revolution the proof that successful insurrection is always possible, for social democrats the necessity to rely on an insurrection of a minority meant only that conditions for socialism were not yet mature. While Branting, for example, shared Gramsci's first reaction to the October Revolution when he maintained that "the whole developmental idea of socialism is discarded in Bolshevism", he drew precisely the conclusion that socialists should wait until conditions ripen to the point that an overwhelming majority of the people would electorally express their will for socialist transformations. Since they were thoroughly persuaded that such conditions would be brought about by the development of capitalism, social democrats were not chagrined by electoral reversals, which were interpreted only to mean that the point had not yet arrived. Even when they had to relinquish control over the government, social democrats were not tempted to hasten the course of history. History spoke through the peo-

ple, who spoke in elections, and no one doubted that history would make people express their will for socialism.

These expectations, based on the conviction about the future course of history, were almost immediately vindicated by the electoral progress of socialist parties. The German party – posed by Engels as the model to be followed – despite years of depression grew from 125,000 votes in 1871 to 312,000 in 1881, 1,427,000 in 1890, to 4,250,400 on the eve of World War I. Indeed, as soon as the Anti-Socialist laws were allowed to lapse, the SPD became in 1890 the largest party in Germany with 19.7 per cent of the vote. By 1912 their share of 34.8 per cent was more than twice that of the next largest party. No wonder that Bebel in 1905 could make “explicit the widely held assumption of his fellow socialists that the working class would continue to grow and that the party would one day embrace a majority of the population...” Several parties entered even more spectacularly into the competition for votes. In 1907, Finnish Social Democrats won the plurality, 37 per cent, in the first election under universal suffrage. The Austrian Social Democrats won 21.0 per cent after male franchise was made universal in 1907, 25.4 per cent in 1911, and the plurality of 40.8 per cent in 1919. The Belgian Parti Ouvrier won 13.2 per cent when the regime censitaire was abolished in 1894 and kept growing in jumps to win in 1925 the plurality of 39.4 per cent, a success which “stimulated them to hope that continuing industrialization would produce an increasing socialist working-class electorate”. Even in those countries where the first steps were not equally dramatic, electoral progress seemed inexorable. In the religiously politicized Netherlands, socialism marched in big steps, from 3 per cent of the total vote in 1896 to 9.5 per cent, 11.2 per cent, 13.9 per cent and 18.5 per cent in 1913. The Danish party obtained 4.9 per cent in 1884, the first election it contested, only 3.5 per cent in 1889; from this moment on the party never failed to increase the share of the vote until 1935 when it won 46.1 per cent. There again, “there was a general expectation that as the sole party representing the labour movement, it would achieve power through an absolute majority of the electorate”. The Swedish party began meekly, offering candidates on joint lists with Liberals, it won 3.5 per cent in 1902, 9.5 per cent in 1905, 14.6 per cent in 1908, jumped to 28.5 per cent in 1911 after suffrage was extended, increased its share to 30.1 per cent and 36.4 per cent in the two successive elections of 1914, and together with its left-wing off-shoot won the plurality of the vote, 39.1 per cent in 1917. The Norwegian Labour Party grew about 5 per cent in each election from 1897 when it obtained 0.6 per cent onward to 1915 when its share reached 32.1 per cent.

Practice was confirming the theory. From election to election the forces of socialism were growing in strength. Each round was a new success. From a few thousand, at best, during the first difficult moments, socialists saw their electorate extend into millions. The progress seemed inexorable; the majority, and the mandate for socialism embodied therein, were only a matter of a few years, a couple of elections away. One more effort and humanity would be ushered into a new era by the overwhelming expression of popular will. “I am convinced,” Bebel spoke at the Erfurt Congress, “that the fulfillment of our aims is so close that there are few in this hall who will not live to see the day.”

Social Democracy and the Working Class

The Socialist party was to be the working class organized. As Bergounioux and Manin observed, “workers’ autonomy outside politics or a political emancipation that would not be specifically workers”, such were the two tendencies at the moment when Marx and Engels contributed to the founding of the International Workingmen’s Association”. Marx’s decisive influence was a synthesis of these two positions: socialism as a movement of the working class in politics. The orientation Marx

advocated was new: to organize a “party” but one that would be distinctly of workers, independent from and opposed to all other classes. The organization of workers “into a class, and consequently into a political party” was necessary for workers to conquer political power and, in Marx’s view, it should not and would not affect the autonomy of the working class as a political force. “The emancipation of the working class should be,” in the celebrated phrase, “the task of the working class itself.”

We know why Marx expected workers to become the moving force for socialism: by virtue of their position within the capitalist society, workers were simultaneously the class that was exploited in the specifically capitalist manner and the only class that had the capacity to organize production on its own once capitalist relations were abolished. Yet this emphasis on the “organic relation between socialism and the working class – the relation conceived of as one between the historical mission and the historical agent” does not explain by itself why socialists sought during the initial period to organize only workers and all the workers. The reasons for this privileged relation between socialist parties and the working class were more immediate and more practical than those that could be found in Marx’s theory of history.

First, capitalism is a system in which workers compete with each other unless they are organized as a class. Similarity of class position does not necessarily result in solidarity since the interests which workers share are precisely those which put them in competition with one another, primarily as they bid down wages in quest of employment. Class interest is something attached to workers as a collectivity rather than as a collection of individuals, their “group” rather than “serial” interest. A general increase of wages is in the interest of all workers, but it does not affect relations among them. Alternatively, a law establishing a minimal level of wages, extending compulsory education, advancing the age of retirement, or limiting working hours affects the relations among workers without being necessarily in the interest of each of them. Indeed, some workers would prefer to work beyond their normal retirement age even if they were excluding other workers from work; some people who do not find employment would be willing to be hired for less than the minimal wage even if it lowered the general level of wages; some would be willing to fulfill their historical mission of emancipating the entire society. In his *Address to the Communist League* in 1850 Marx emphasized that workers “must themselves do the utmost for their final victory by clarifying their minds as to what their class interests are, by taking their position as an independent party as soon as possible and by not allowing themselves to be seduced for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeoisie into refraining from the independent organization of the party of the proletariat”. Rosenberg reports the tendency of German socialism in the 1860s to “isolate itself and to emphasize these qualities that differentiated it from all the groups and tendencies of the wealthy classes. At this stage the radical proletarian movement tended particularly to see the nobility and the peasants, the manufacturers and the intellectuals as ‘a uniform reactionary mass’.” The same was true of the first labour candidates who competed in the Paris election of 1863. The notion of “one single reactionary mass” underlied the *Gotha Programme* of 1875 and reappeared in the Swedish programme of 1889. Still in 1891, when Engels was asked to comment on Kautsky’s draft of the *Erfurt Programme*, he objected to a reference to “the people in general” by asking “who is that?” And with his typical eloquence, Jules Guesde argued in Lille in 1890: “The Revolution which is incumbent upon you is possible only to the extent that you will remain yourselves, class against class, not knowing and not wanting to know the divisions that may exist in the capitalist world.”

Indeed, the initial difficulty which socialists faced was that workers were distrustful of any influences originating outside their class. Socialism seemed an abstract and an alien ideology in

relation to daily experience. It was not apparent to workers that an improvement of their conditions required that the very system of wage labour must be abolished. Bergounioux and Manin report that according to a study of French workers at the beginning of the Third Republic there was a resistance among workers to the socialist message, an emphasis on the direct conflict between workers and employers, and a neglect of politics. In Belgium, a party bearing a socialist label, *Parti socialiste belge*, was founded in 1879 but had difficulty persuading workers' associations to affiliate. According to Landauer workers were mistrustful of socialist propaganda, and de Paepe argued that "the word 'socialist' frightens many workers". Thus was born in 1885 the *Parti ouvrier belge*: a workers' party in place of a socialist one. In Great Britain, trade-unionists objected to, and until 1918 were successful in preventing, the Labour Party from admitting members of other classes on an individual basis. If socialists were to be successful, theirs had to be a workers' party. In Sweden, the first local cells of the Social Democratic Party were in fact called *Arbetarekommuner*, Workers' Communes. Socialists were anxious to emphasize the class character of the movement and were willing to make doctrinal compromises to implant socialism among workers.

The Dilemma of Proletarian Electoralism

The majority which socialists expected to win in elections was to be formed by workers. The proletariat – acting upon its interests and conscious of its mission – was to be the social force precipitating society into socialism. But this proletariat was not, and never became, a numerical majority of voting members of any society. The prediction that the displaced members of the old middle classes would either become proletarians or join the army of the unemployed did not materialize.

The old middle classes, particularly the independent agricultural proprietors, almost vanished as a group in most Western European countries, but their sons and daughters were more likely to find employment in an office or a store than in a factory. Moreover, while the proportion of the adult population engaged in any activity outside the household drastically fell in the course of capitalist development, those excluded from gainful activities did not become a reserve proletariat. Extended compulsory education, forced retirement, large standing armies, effective barriers to economic participation of women, all had the effect of reducing entry into the proletariat. As a result, from 1890 to 1980 the proletariat continued to be a minority of the population. In Belgium, the first European country to have built substantial industry, the proportion of workers did break the magic number of the majority when it reached 50.1 per cent in 1912. Since then it has declined systematically, down to 19.1 per cent in 1971. In Denmark, the proportion of workers in the electorate never exceeded 29 per cent. In Finland, it never surpassed 24 per cent. In France, this proportion declined from 39.4 per cent in 1893 to 24.8 per cent in 1968. In Germany, workers increased as a proportion of the electorate from 25.5 per cent in 1871, to 36.9 per cent in 1903, and since then has constituted about one third of the electorate. In Norway, workers constituted 33 per cent of the electorate in 1894 and their proportion peaked in 1900 at 34.1 per cent. In Sweden, the proportion of workers in the electorate grew from 28.9 per cent in 1908 to 40.4 per cent in 1952; then it declined to 38.5 per cent in 1964.

The rules of the democratic game, while universal and at times fair, show no compassion. If a party is to govern alone, unburdened by the moderating influence of alliances and the debts of compromise, it must obtain some specific proportion of the vote, not much different from 50 per cent. Electoral institutions preceded the birth of parties which sought to use them as the vehicle toward socialism, and those institutions carried within themselves the fundamental rule which makes the

victory of an isolated minority impossible. A party representing a class which has fewer members than the other classes combined cannot win electoral battles.

The combination of minority status with majority rule constitutes the historical condition under which socialists have to act. This objective condition imposes upon socialist parties a choice: socialists must choose between a party homogeneous in its class appeal, but sentenced to perpetual electoral defeats, and a party that struggles for electoral success at the cost of diluting its class character. This choice is not between revolution and reform. There is no a priori reason, and no historical evidence, to suppose that an electoral class-pure party of workers would be any more revolutionary than a party heterogeneous in its class base. Indeed, class-pure electoral parties of workers, of which the SPD during the Weimar period is probably the prime example, can be totally committed to the defence of particularistic interests of workers within the confines of capitalist society. Such class parties can easily become mere electoral interest groups, pressuring for a larger share of the national product without any concern for the manner in which it is produced. A pure party of workers who constituted a majority of the electorate would perhaps have maintained its ultimate commitment without a compromise, as socialists said they would when they saw the working class as majoritarian. But to continue as a minority party dedicated exclusively to ultimate goals, in a game in which one needs a majority – more, an overwhelming mandate – to realize these goals, would have been absurd. To gain electoral influence for whatever aims, from the ultimate to the most immediate, working class parties must seek support from members of other classes.

Given the minority status of workers within the class structure of capitalist societies, the decision to participate in elections thus alters the very logic of the problem of revolutionary transformation. The democratic system played a perverse trick on socialist intentions: the emancipation of the working class could not be the task of workers themselves if this emancipation was to be realized through elections. The only question left was whether a majority for socialism could be recruited by seeking electoral support beyond the working class.

There is a peculiar tendency among contemporary observers, to see the strategy of appealing to a heterogeneous class base as a relatively recent effect of the “deradicalization” of socialist movements. The German *Mittelklasse Strategie* is seen as the prototype of this new orientation and Kurt Schumacher as its architect. In this interpretation socialist parties began to enlist support from groups other than workers only after they have given up their socialist goals.

This view is simply inaccurate. Socialists sought support beyond the working class as soon as the prospect of electoral victory became real and ever since they have continued to go back and forth between a search for allies and the emphasis on the working class. That triumphant forecast made by Engels in 1895 which predicted that socialists would become a force before which “all powers will have to bow” was conditional in his view upon the success of the party in “conquering the greater part of the middle strata of society, petty bourgeoisie and small peasants”. His advice to the French party – advice the French did not need since they were already heeding it – was the same: recruit the small peasants. The *Erfurt Programme* of 1891 set the tone in which appeals to “the middle classes” were couched: their interests “paralleled” those of the proletariat; they were the “natural allies” of the proletariat. Guesdists in France began to advocate alliances as soon as Guesde was elected to the Parliament in 1893. In Belgium, the first programme adopted in 1894 by the *Parti ouvrier* appealed to the lower middle class and the intelligentsia. In Sweden, a multi-class strategy was debated as early as 1889, and the party kept moving toward a heterogeneous class orientation until its full acceptance in 1920. The British Labour Party did defeat, in 1912, a proposal to open the membership, on an individual basis, to “managers, foremen, [and] persons engaged in commercial pursuits on their own account.” But in 1918, as it took a programmatic turn to the

left, Labour opened its ranks to “workers by brain”. Indeed, in his polemic with Beer, McKibbin interprets the very emphasis on socialism in the 1918 programme as an attempt to capture the “professional middle classes”. Revisionists everywhere asserted that workers were not a majority and that the party must seek support beyond the working class. Bernstein, Jaurès, and MacDonald came to this conclusion independently: once a party committed itself to electoral competition they had to embrace this conclusion. By 1915, Michels could already characterize social democratic strategy as follows: “For motives predominantly electoral, the party of the workers seeks support from the petty bourgeois elements of society, and this gives rise to more or less extensive reactions upon the party itself. The Labour Party becomes the party of the ‘people’. Its appeals are no longer addressed to the manual workers, but to ‘all producers’, to the ‘entire working population’, these phrases being applied to all the classes and all the strata of society except the idlers who live upon the income from investments.”

The post-war orientation of several social democratic parties toward broadly understood middle strata is not a result of a new strategic posture but rather a reflection of the changing class structure of Western Europe. The proportion of the population engaged in agriculture declined during the twentieth century, more rapidly during the 1950s than during any of the preceding decades. The “new middle classes” almost replaced the “old” one numerically. Party strategies reflected, albeit with some lag, the numerical evolution of class structure. What is relatively new, therefore, is only the explicit indication of salaried employees as a pool of potential socialist support. It was Bernstein after all who introduced the notion of the *Volkspartei*, not Schumacher or Brandt. The search for allies is inherent to electoralism.

Dissolving the Class Appeal

Once they decided to compete for the votes of “natural allies”, whether these were the old or the new middle classes, socialists were appealing to the overwhelming majority of the population. Branting’s estimate in 1889 that the “people” constituted ninety-five per cent of the Swedish society was probably only slightly exaggerated, given his definition of “the people”. Seeking an equitable distribution of the burden of World War I debt, *Labour and the New Social Order*, a programmatic document of the party, asserted that “In this manner the Labour Party claims the support of four-fifths of the whole nation.” There is no reason to doubt that today the working class together with its allies comprise around eighty per cent of the population of France or of the United States. If to industrial workers we add white-collar employees, petty bourgeois, housewives, retirees, and students, almost no one is left to represent interests antagonistic to socialism. Exploiters remain but a handful: “the businessman with a tax-free expense account, the speculator with tax-free capital gains and the retiring company director with a tax-free redundancy payment,” in the words of the 1959 Labour Party electoral manifesto.

Yet social democratic parties have never obtained the votes of four-fifths of the electorate in any country. Only in a few instances have they won the support of one-half of the people who actually went to the polls. They are far from obtaining the votes of all whom they claim to represent. Moreover, they cannot even win the votes of all workers’ the proletariat in the classical sense of the word. In several countries as many as one-third of manual workers vote for bourgeois parties. In Belgium as many as one half of the workers do not vote socialist. In the United Kingdom, the Labour Party lost 49 per cent of the working class vote in the 1979 election. Social democrats appear condemned to minority status when they are a class party, and they seem equally relegated when they seek to be the party of the masses, of the entire nation. As a pure party of workers they

cannot win the mandate for socialism, but as a party of the entire nation they have not won it either.

Some of the reasons why no political party ever won a majority with a programme of socialist transformation are undoubtedly external to the electoral system. Yet social democratic parties face a purely electoral dilemma. Class shapes the political behaviour of individuals only as long as people who are workers are organized politically as workers. If political parties do not mobilize people *qua* workers but as “the masses”, “the people”, “consumers”, “taxpayers”, or simply “citizens”, then workers are less likely to identify themselves as class members and, eventually, less likely to vote as workers. By broadening their appeal to the “masses”, social democrats weaken the general salience of class as a determinant of the political behaviour of individuals.

The strategies oriented toward broad electoral support have an effect not only upon the relation between workers and other classes but primarily within the class, upon the relations among workers. In order to be successful in electoral competition, social democratic parties must present themselves to different groups as an instrument for the realization of their immediate economic interests, immediate in the sense that these interests can be realized when the party is victorious in the forthcoming election. Supra-class alliances must be based on a convergence of immediate economic interests of the working class and of other groups. Social democrats must offer credits to the bourgeoisie, pensions to salaried employees, minimal wages to workers, protection to consumers, education to the young, family allowances to families. This convergence cannot be found in measures that strengthen the cohesion and combativeness of workers against other classes. When social democrats extend their appeal, they must promise to struggle not for objectives specific to workers as a collectivity – those that constitute the public goods for workers as a class – but only those which workers share as individuals with members of other classes. The common grounds can be found in a shift of the tax burden from indirect to direct taxation, in consumer protection laws, in spending on public transport, and the like. These are concerns which workers as individuals share with others who receive low incomes, who purchase consumer products, who travel to work. They are not interests of workers as a class but of the poor, of consumers, commuters, etc.

None of this implies that the party no longer represents workers when it appeals to the masses. Although the convergence is never perfect and some interests of workers are often compromised, the party continues to represent those interests which workers as individuals share with other people. Hence social democratic parties oriented toward “the people” continue to be parties of workers as individuals. But they cease to be the organization of workers as a class which disciplines individuals in their competition with each other by posing them against other classes. It is the very principle of class conflict – the conflict between internally cohesive collectivities – that becomes compromised as parties of workers become parties of the masses.

Differentiation of class appeal, however, affects not only the organization of workers as a class. It has a fundamental effect on the form of political conflicts in capitalist societies since it reinstates a classless vision of politics. When social democratic parties become parties “of the entire nation”, they reinforce the vision of politics as a process of defining the collective welfare of “all members of the society”. Politics, once again, is defined on the dimension individual-nation, not in terms of class.

This de-emphasis of class conflict in turn affects workers. As class identification becomes less salient, socialist parties lose their unique appeal to workers. Social democratic parties are no longer qualitatively different from other parties; class loyalty is no longer the strongest base of self-identification. One can no longer recall, as Vivian Gornick did of her childhood, that: “Before I knew I was Jewish or a girl I knew that I was a member of the working class.” Workers see society

as composed of individuals; they view themselves as members of collectivities other than class; they behave politically on the basis of religious, ethnic, regional, or some other affinity. They become Catholics, Southerners, Francophones, or simply “citizens”.

It is now clear that the dilemma comes back with a vengeance within the very system of electoral competition. The choice between class petty purity and broad support must be lived continually by social democratic parties because when they attempt to increase their electoral support beyond the working class these parties reduce their capacity to mobilize workers. This choice was not made once and for all by any party; nor does it represent a unidirectional evolution. Indeed, if there exists an electoral trade-off between appealing to the masses and recruiting workers, then strategic shifts are imperative from the purely electoral point of view. Histories of particular parties are replete with strategic reversals, with major changes of direction, controversies, schisms, and scissions. SPD returned to an emphasis on class in 1905; Swedish Social Democrats temporarily abandoned their attempt to become a multi-class party once in 1926, and then again in 1953; the Norwegian Labour Party emphasized its class orientation in 1918; German young socialists launched a serious attack on the *Mittleklass Strategie* a decade ago; conflicts between an *ouvrierist* and a multiclass tendency today wrench several parties. In terms of purely electoral considerations social democrats face a dilemma. They are forced to go back and forth between an emphasis on class and an appeal to the nation. They seem unable to win either way, and they behave the way rational people do when confronted with dilemmas: they bemoan and regret, change their strategies, and once again bemoan and regret.

Social Democrats have not succeeded in turning elections into an instrument of socialist transformation. To be effective in elections they have to seek allies who would join workers under the socialist banner, yet at the same time they erode exactly that ideology which is the source of their strength among workers. They cannot remain a party of workers alone and yet they can never cease to be a workers party.

Reform and Revolution

Socialists entered into elections with ultimate goals. The Hague Congress of the First International proclaimed that the “organization the proletariat into a political party is necessary to ensure the victory of social revolution and its ultimate goal – the abolishment of classes”. The first Swedish programme specified that “Social Democracy differs from other parties in that it aspires to completely transform the economic organization of bourgeois society and bring about the social liberation of the working class...” Even the most reformist among revisionists, Millerand, admonished that “whoever does not admit the necessary and progressive replacement of capitalist property by social property is not a socialist”.

These were the goals that were to be reached through legislation, upon a mandate of an electorally expressed majority, as the will of universal suffrage. Socialists were going to abolish exploitation, to destroy the division of society into classes, to remove all economic and political inequalities, to end the wastefulness and anarchy of capitalist production, to eradicate all sources of injustice and prejudice. They were going to emancipate not only workers but humanity, to build a society based on cooperation, to rationally orient energies and resources toward satisfaction of human needs, to create social conditions for an unlimited development of the personality. Rationality, justice and freedom were the guiding goals of the social democratic movement.

These were ultimate goals: they could not be realized immediately, for economic as well as political reasons. And social democrats were unwilling to wait for the day when these aims could

finally be accomplished. They claimed to represent the interests of workers and of other groups not only in the future but as well within “present-day”, that is, capitalist society. The *Parti Socialiste Française*, led by Jaurès, proclaimed at its Tours Congress of 1902: “The Socialist Party, rejecting the policy of all or nothing, has a programme of reforms whose realization it pursues forthwith”, and listed 54 specific demands concerning democratization, secularization, organization of justice, family, education, taxation, protection of labour, social insurance, nationalization of industries, and foreign policy. The first programme of the Swedish Social Democrats in 1897 demanded direct taxation, development of state and municipal productive activities, public credit including direct state control of credit for farmers, legislation concerning work conditions, old age, sickness, and accident insurance, legal equality, and freedoms of organization, assembly, speech, and press.

This orientation toward immediate improvements was never seen by its architects as a departure from ultimate goals. Since socialism was thought to be inevitable, there would be no reason why immediate measures should not be advocated by socialist parties: there was no danger, not even a possibility, that such measures could prevent the advent of the inescapable. As Kautsky put it, “it would be a profound error to imagine that such reforms could delay the social revolution”. Ultimate goals were going to be realized because History was on the side of socialism. Revisionists within the movement were, if anything, even more deterministic than those who advocated insurrectionary tactics. Millerand argued, for example, in his Saint-Mandé speech, that: “Men do not and will not set up collectivism; it is setting itself up daily; it is, if I may be allowed the phrase, being secreted by the capitalist regime.”

Even when social democratic movements left the protection of history to rediscover a justification of socialism in ethical values, no dilemma appeared in the consciousness of socialist leaders. Bernstein’s famous renunciation of final goals did not imply that they would remain unfulfilled, but only that the way to realize them was to concentrate on proximate aims. Jaurès, speaking about the conquest of political power by workers, provided the classical image: “I do not believe, either, that there will necessarily be an abrupt leap, the crossing of the abyss; perhaps we shall be aware of having entered the zone of the Socialistic State as navigators are aware of having crossed the line of a hemisphere – not that they have been able to see as they crossed a cord stretched over the ocean warning them of their passage, but that little by little they have been led into a new hemisphere by the progress of their ship.” Indeed, for social democrats immediate reforms constitute “steps” in the sense that gradually they accumulate toward a complete restructuring of society. Anticipating Bernstein’s argumentation, George von Vollmar, the leader of the Bavarian wing of the SPD, declared at the Erfurt Congress: “Beside the general or ultimate goal we see a nearer aim: the advancement of the most immediate needs of the people. For me, the achievement of the most immediate demands is the main thing, not only because they are of great propagandist value and serve to enlist the masses, but also because, in my opinion, this gradual progress, this gradual socialization, is the method strongly indicated for a progressive transition.”

Reform and revolution do not require a choice within the social democratic view of the world. To bring about “social revolution” – the phrase which before 1917 connoted transformation of social relations but not necessarily an insurrection – it is sufficient to follow the path of reforms. Reforms are thought to be cumulative and irreversible: there was nothing strange in Jaurès’ argument that: “Precisely because it is a party of revolution ... the Socialist Party is the most actively reformist...” The more reforms, the faster they are introduced, the nearer the social revolution, the sooner the socialist ship would sail into the new world. And even when times are not auspicious for new steps to be made, even when political or economic circumstances require that reforms be postponed, eventually each new reform would build upon the past accomplishments. Mitigating the effects

of capitalism and transforming it piece by piece would eventually lead to a complete restructuring of society. Reviewing Miliband's (1969) book, Benjamin Barber best expressed this perspective: "surely at some point mitigation becomes transformation, attenuation becomes abolition; at some point capitalism's 'concessions' annihilate capitalism... This is not to say that such a point has been reached, only that there must be such a point."

Welfare Displaces Socialization

The "social revolution" envisioned by social democrats was necessary because capitalism was irrational and unjust. And the fundamental cause of this inefficiency and inequity was private property of the means of production. While private property was occasionally seen as the source of most disparate evils – from prostitution and alcoholism to wars – it was always held directly responsible for the irrationality of the capitalist system and for the injustice and poverty that it generated. Already in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, one of the most important theoretical sources of the socialist movement, Engels emphasized that the increasing rationality of capitalist production within each firm is accompanied, and must be accompanied, by the chaos and anarchy of production at the societal scale. "The contradiction between socialized production and capitalist appropriation," Engels wrote, "now presents itself as *an antagonism* between the organization of production in the individual workshop and the anarchy of production in society generally." Speaking in 1920, Branting repeated that: "In the basic premises of the present social order there are no satisfactory guarantees either that production as an entity is given the most rational orientation possible, or that profit in the various branches is used in the way that is best from the national economic and social point of view."

The second effect of private property is the unjust distribution of material rewards which it generates. "The economic case for socialism," wrote a Labour Party theoretician, "is largely based on the inability of capitalism to bring about any equitable or even practicable distribution of commodities in an age of mechanization and mass-production." Even the most decisive break with the Marxist tradition, the SPD's Bad Godesberg programme of 1959, maintained that the "Market economy does not assure of itself a just distribution of income and property".

Given this analysis, socialization or nationalization of the means of production was the principal method of realizing socialist goals and hence the first task to be accomplished by social democrats after the conquest of power. "Social revolution," writes Tingsten "was always understood to mean systematic, deliberate socialization under the leadership of the Social Democratic working class." Socialization or nationalization – a terminological ambiguity which was significant – was the manner by which socialist revolution would be realized.

Until World War I, as socialist parties concentrated their efforts on winning suffrage and organizing workers as a class, little if any concrete thought was devoted to the means by which socialization was to be accomplished. The very possibility of actually being in a position to pursue a programme of socialization caught all socialist parties by surprise when the war destroyed the established order, unleashed spontaneous movements of factory occupations, and opened the doors to government participation. Indeed, the wave of factory occupations which occurred in Austria, Germany, Finland, Italy, and Sweden appeared to the established socialist parties and trade-unions as almost as much a threat to their own authority and organization as to the capitalist order.

As these spontaneous movements were repressed or exhausted, the logic of parliamentarism re-established its grip on the social democratic movement. Nationalization efforts turned out to be so similar in several countries that their story can be summarized briefly. The issue of socialization

was immediately placed on the agenda of social democratic parties in Austria, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, and Sweden and of the CGT in France. In several countries, notably Germany, Great Britain, and Sweden, "socialization commissions" were established by respective parliaments, while in France Léon Blum introduced in the Chamber a bill to nationalize the railway industry. The commissions were supposed to prepare detailed programmes of socialization – in some cases for all basic industries and in others for specific ones, typically coal. The British commission finished its career quickly as Lloyd George simply ignored its recommendations; in Germany the issue of coal nationalization lingered after the resignation of the first commission; and in Sweden the socialization committee worked 16 years, spending most of its time studying similar efforts elsewhere, and expired without making any recommendations. Although social democrats formed or entered governments in several countries, the global result of these first attempts at socialization was null: with the exception of the French armament industry in 1936, not a single company was nationalized in Western Europe by a social democratic government during the entire inter-war period.

How did it happen that the movement that aimed to revolutionize society by changing the very base of its productive organization ended the period of integration into the political institutions of capitalism without even touching its fundamentals? When Marx described in 1850 the anatomy of capitalist democracy, he was certain that, unless withdrawn, universal suffrage would lead from "political to social emancipation"; that once endowed with political rights, workers would proceed immediately to destroy the "social power" of capitalists by socializing the means of production. Still in 1928, Wigforss saw this outcome as inevitable: "The universal suffrage is incompatible with a society divided into a small class of owners and a large class of unpropertied. Either the rich and the propertied will take away universal suffrage, or the poor, with the help of their right to vote, will procure for themselves a part of the accumulated riches." And yet while social democrats held power in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Norway, and Sweden, riches remained nearly intact, and certainly private property in the means of production was not disturbed.

One can cite a number of reasons. Not negligible was the theoretical ambiguity of the very project of the "expropriation of expropriators". One difficulty lay in that ambiguous relation between "socialization" – the turning over of industries to their employees – and "nationalization" – their general direction by the state. On the one hand, as Korsch, Wigforss, and others pointed out, direct control of particular firms by the immediate producers would not remove the antagonism between producers and consumers, that is, workers in other firms. On the other hand, transfer to centralized control of the state would have the effect of replacing the private authority of capital by the bureaucratic authority of the government, and the Soviet example loomed largely as a negative one. The "*gestionnaire*" tendency dominated in Germany, where the principle was even incorporated into the Constitution, and Sweden; the "*planiste*" tendency found its most important articulation in Belgium and France under the influence of Henri de Man. A veritable wave of constitution writing ensued in the immediate aftermath of World War I: Otto Bauer in Austria (1919), Karl Kautsky in Germany (1925), G. D. H. Cole in Great Britain (1919), Henri de Man in Belgium – all rushed to devise some way of combining rationality at the level of the society as a whole with the control of the immediate producers over their own activities.

Yet this burst of theoretical activity came rather belatedly in relation to the demands of practical politics. The fact, frequently admitted by social democratic politicians, was that they did not know how to proceed to the realization of their programme. The choice of industries which were to be nationalized, methods of financing, techniques of management, and the mutual relations among

sectors turned out to be technical problems for which social democrats were unprepared. Hence they formed study commissions and waited.

Nevertheless, the cause of the social democratic inertia was much more profound than the ambiguity of their plans. Socialists never won a sufficient number of votes to obtain a parliamentary majority and hence to be able to legislate anything without support, or at least consent, of other parties. Remarkably, and quite to their surprise, socialist parties in several countries were invited to take office as minority governments or to enter governments as members of multi-party coalitions. And the question of what to do as a minority government presented itself as the following choice: either the party would pursue its socialist objectives and be promptly defeated or it would behave like any other party, administering the system and introducing only those few reforms for which it could obtain a parliamentary majority.

Each strategy was viewed in terms of its long-term effects. Proponents of the maximalist strategy argued that the party would educate the electorate about its socialist program and would expose the reactionary character of the bourgeois parties. They claimed that the people would then return the party to office with a majority and the mandate to pursue its socialist programme. Only in Norway was this strategy adopted; the government lasted three days in 1928; and the party was returned to office four years later only after it had moderated its socialist objectives.

Proponents of a minimal programme argued that the most important task a party could accomplish was to demonstrate that it was “fit to govern”, that it was a governmental party. “We are not going to undertake office to prepare for a General Election,” said MacDonald in 1924, “we are going to take office in order to work.” Their expectation, in turn, rested on the belief that reforms were irreversible and cumulative. As Lyman put it, “Gradualists imagined that socialism could be achieved by instalments, each instalment being accepted with no more serious obstruction on the part of the Conservatives than Labour opposition generally gave to Tory governments. Each instalment would then remain, unharmed by interludes of Tory rule, and ready to serve as the foundation on which the next Labour government would resume construction of the socialist commonwealth.” Hence the party would come into office, introduce those reforms and only those reforms for which it could muster the support of a parliamentary majority, and then leave to return when a new mandate issued from the electorate. “We hope to continue only as long in office, but certainly as long in office, as will enable us to do some good work that will remove many obstacles which would have hampered future governments if they found the problems that we know how to face”: this was the intention of the Labour party in 1924, according to MacDonald. Hence Blum introduced a distinction between the “exercise of power” and the “conquest of power”: as a minority socialists could only exercise it, but they should exercise it in such a way that would eventually lead to its conquest.

If socialists could not pursue an immediate programme of nationalization, what could they do in the meantime? They could and did pursue ad hoc measures designed to improve the conditions of workers: develop housing programmes, institute some protection from unemployment, introduce minimum wage laws, income and inheritance taxes, old age pensions. Such measures, although they favoured workers, were neither politically unfeasible nor economically shocking – they continued the tradition of reforms associated with Bismarck, Disraeli, and Giolitti. These measures neither modified the structure of the economy nor the political balance of forces.

The fact is that until the 1930s social democrats did not have any kind of economic policy of their own. The economic theory of the Left was the theory that criticized capitalism, claimed the superiority of socialism, and led to a programme of nationalization of the means of production. Once this programme was suspended – it was not yet abandoned – no socialist economic policy was

left. Socialists behaved like all other parties: with some distributional bias toward their constituency but full of respect for the golden principles of the balanced budget, deflationary anti-crisis policies, gold standard, and so on. Of Blum it is said that he “could envisage no intermediate stage between pure doctrinaire socialism and the free play of capitalism ...” and it seems that neither could anyone else. The only known theory of reforms was that which called for nationalization; no other coherent alternative existed.

Such an alternative did emerge in response to the Great Depression. In Sweden, Norway, and to a lesser extent France, socialist governments responded to unemployment with a series of anti-cyclical policies that broke the existing economic orthodoxy. It remains a matter of controversy whether the Swedish policies were developed autonomously, from Marx via Wicksell, or were an application of the already circulating ideas of Keynes. The fact is that social democrats everywhere soon discovered in Keynes' ideas, particularly after the appearance of his *General Theory*, something they urgently needed: a distinct policy for administering capitalist economies. The Keynesian revolution – and this is what it was – provided social democrats with a goal and hence the justification of their governmental role and simultaneously transformed the ideological significance of distributive policies that favoured the working class.

From the passive victim of economic cycles, the state became transformed almost overnight into an institution by which society could regulate crises to maintain full employment. Describing the policies of the Swedish government of 1932, Gustav Möller, the architect of the unemployment programme, emphasized that previously unemployment relief was a “system meant only to supply bare necessities to the unemployed, and did not have the purpose of counteracting the depression... Economic cycles, it was said, follow natural economic laws, and governmental interference with them is, by and large, purposeless and, from a financial point of view, even dangerous in the long run”. Both Möller and Wigforss described how the Swedish Social Democrats discovered that unemployment could be reduced and the economy invigorated if the state followed anti-cyclical policies, allowing deficits to finance productive public works during depressions and paying back the debts during periods of expansion. Society is not helpless against the whims of the capitalist market, the economy can be controlled, and the welfare of citizens can be continually enhanced by the active role of the state: this was the new discovery of social democrats.

And this was not all: Keynesianism was not only a theory that justified socialist participation in government but, even more fortuitously from the social democratic point of view, it was a theory that suddenly granted a universalistic status to the interests of workers. Earlier, all demands for increased consumption were viewed as inimical to the national interest: higher wages meant lower profits and hence a reduced opportunity for investment and future development. The only conceivable response to crises was to cut costs of production, that is, wages. This was still the view of the Labour Party in 1929. But in the logic of Keynes' theory higher wages, particularly if the wage fund was increased by raising employment rather than the wage rate (which did not rise in Sweden until 1936), meant an increase of aggregate demand, which implied increased expectations of profit, increased investment, and hence economic stimulation. The significance of increasing wages changed from being viewed as an impediment to national economic development to being its stimulus. Corporatist defence of the interests of workers, a policy social democrats pursued during the 'twenties, and the electoral strategy toward the “people” now found ideological justification in a technical economic theory.

The Keynesian turn soon led social democrats to develop a full-fledged ideology of the “welfare state”. Social democrats defined their role as that of modifying the play of the market forces, in effect abandoning the project of nationalization altogether. The successful application of Keynesian instruments was seen as the demonstration that nationalization – full of problems and uncertainties

as it proved to be – was not only impossible to achieve in a parliamentary way but was simply unnecessary. Keynes himself wrote: “It is not the ownership of the instruments of production which it is important for the state to assume. If the state is able to determine the aggregate amount of resources devoted to augmenting the instruments and the basic rate of reward to those who own them, it will have accomplished all that is necessary.” As Wigforss argued further, state ownership of particular industries would only result in the socialist government being forced to behave as a capitalist firm, subject to “the chaos of the market”, while by indirect control the state could rationalize the economy as a whole and orient it toward the general welfare.

The theoretical underpinning of this new perspective was the distinction between the concept of property as the authority to manage and property as legal possession. Already Bernstein claimed that “the basic issue of socialization is that we place production, economic life, under the control of the public weal”. Instead of direct ownership, the state could achieve all the socialist goals by influencing private industry to behave in the general interest. “The essence of nationalization,” wrote de Man in 1934 “is less the transfer of property than the transfer of authority...” If the state could regulate private industry when necessary and if it could mitigate the effects of the free play of market forces, then direct ownership would be unnecessary and inadvisable: this became the motto of social democracy in the aftermath of the Keynesian revolution.

In sum, unable as minority governments to pursue the social programme, in the mid-thirties, social democracy found a distinct economic policy which justified its governmental role, which specified a number of intermediate reforms that could be successively accomplished within the confines of capitalism, and which provided in several countries a successful electoral platform. Caught in the 'twenties in an all-or-nothing position, social democrats discovered a new path to reform by abandoning the project of nationalization for that of general welfare.

The Abandonment of Reformism

The abandonment of programmatic nationalization of the means of production did not imply that the state would never become engaged in economic activities. In contemporary Western European countries between 5 and 20 per cent of gross product is now being produced by enterprises of which the state is in some form a complete owner. The paths by which this “public sector” developed are too varied to recount here. In Italy and Spain the public sector constitutes mainly a fascist legacy; in Austria it consists predominantly of confiscated German properties; in Great Britain and France a wave of nationalizations followed World War II. Characteristically, state enterprises are limited to credit institutions, coal, iron and steel, energy production and distribution, transport, and communication. Outside these sectors only those companies which are threatened with bankruptcy and hence a reduction of employment pass into public hands. Instances in which the state would be engaged in producing and selling final-demand goods are extremely rare; they seem to be limited to the automobile industry. The state engages in those economic activities which are necessary for the economy as a whole and sells its products and services mainly to private firms. Hence, the state does not compete with private capital but rather provides the inputs necessary for the profitable functioning of the economy as a whole.

This division between the state and the market has been recently enshrined in the “public goods theory of the state”. This theory assumes that the capitalist market is a natural form of economic activity; the existence of the market and its laws are taken as given. The role of the state is supposed to be limited to the provision of so-called “public goods”: those that are indivisible and which must be supplied to everyone if they are supplied to anyone. It is proper for the state to

construct public roads or to train the labour force: rational private entrepreneurs will not provide such goods since they cannot prevent people from using roads or from selling their newly acquired skills to competitors. The role of the state is thus supposed to be limited to those activities that are unprofitable for private entrepreneurs yet needed for the economy as a whole.

Hence, the structure of the capitalist systems built by social democrats turned out to be the following: (1) the state operates those activities which are unprofitable for private firms but necessary for the economy as a whole; (2) the state regulates, particularly by pursuing anti-cyclical policies, the operation of the private sector; and (3) the state mitigates, through welfare measures, the distributional effects of the operation of the market.

The regulatory activities of the state are based on the belief that private capitalists can be induced to allocate resources in a manner desired by citizens and expressed at the polls. The basic notion is that in a capitalistic democracy resources are allocated by two mechanisms: the "market", in which the weight of preferences of decision-makers is proportional to the resources they control, and the state, in which the weight of preferences is distributed equally to persons *qua* citizens. The essence of contemporary social democracy is the conviction that the market can be directed to those allocations of any good, public or private, that are preferred by citizens and that by gradually rationalizing the economy the state can turn capitalists into private functionaries of the public without altering the juridical status of private property.

Having made the commitment to maintain private property of the means of production, to assure efficiency, and to mitigate distributional effects, social democracy ceased to be a reformist movement. Reformism always meant a gradual progression toward structural transformations; reformism was traditionally justified by the belief that reforms are cumulative, that they constitute steps, that they lead in some direction. The current policy of social democrats by its very logic no longer permits the cumulation of reforms.

The abandonment of reformism is a direct consequence of those reforms that have been accomplished. Since the state is engaged almost exclusively in those activities which are unprofitable from the private point of view, it is deprived of financial resources needed to continue the process of nationalization. Having nationalized deficitary sectors, social democrats undermined their very capacity to gradually extend the public realm. At the same time, having strengthened the market, social democrats perpetuate the need to mitigate the distributional effect of its operation. Welfare reforms do not even have to be "undone" by bourgeois governments. It is sufficient that the operation of the market is left to itself for any length of time and inequalities increase, unemployment fluctuates, shifts of demand for labour leave new groups exposed to impoverishment, etc. As Martin put it with regard to Great Britain, "The 'basic structure of the full employment welfare state' did not prove as durable as Crosland's analysis would lead us to expect. However, this was not because Conservative governments between 1951 and 1964 proceeded to dismantle it... All that was necessary to undermine the full employment welfare state was for the Conservative governments simply to do nothing to counteract these processes." Mitigation does not become transformation: indeed, without transformation the need to mitigate becomes eternal. Social democrats find themselves in the situation which Marx attributed to Louis Bonaparte: their policies seem contradictory since they are forced at the same time to strengthen the productive power of capital and to counteract its effects.

The final result of this orientation is that social democrats again find themselves without a distinct alternative of their own as they face a crisis of the international system. When in office they are forced to behave like any other party, relying on deflationary, cost-cutting measures to ensure private profitability and the capacity to invest. Measures oriented to increase democracy at

the work-place – the recent rediscovery of social democrats – not surprisingly echo the posture of the movement in the 1920s, another period when the Left lacked any macro-economic approach of its own.

Economic Bases of Class Compromise

As soon as social democrats formed governments after World War I, they discovered that their concern with justice was not immediately compatible with the goal of increased productivity. In Wigforss' words, "Because Social Democracy works for a more equal and more just distribution of property and incomes, it must never forget that one must produce before one has something to distribute." The concern for restoring and extending industrial productive capacity quickly came to dominate the first discussions of socialization of industry in Germany and Sweden. Certainly a just distribution of poverty was not the socialist promise, and to enhance affluence social democrats had to focus their efforts on increasing productivity.

But without nationalization of the means of production, increases of productivity require profitability of private enterprise. As long as the process of accumulation is private, the entire society is dependent upon maintaining private profits and upon the actions of capitalists allocating these profits. Hence the efficacy of social democrats – as of any other party – in regulating the economy and mitigating the social effects depends upon the profitability of the private sector and the willingness of capitalists to cooperate. The very capacity of social democrats to regulate the economy depends upon the profits of capital. This is the structural barrier which cannot be broken: the limit of any policy is that investment and thus profits must be protected in the long run.

The basic compromise of social democrats with private capital is thus an expression of the very structure of capitalist society. Once private property of the means of production was left intact, it became in the interest of wage-earners that capitalists appropriate profits. As Chancellor Schmidt put it, "The profits of enterprises today are the investments of tomorrow, and the investments of tomorrow are the employment of the day after" (*Le Monde*, July 6, 1976). This expectation – that current profits would be transformed into future improvements of material conditions of wage-earners – became the foundation of the social democratic consent to capitalism. Social democrats consent to the right of capitalists to withhold a part of societal product because the profits appropriated by capital are expected to be saved, invested, transformed into productive capacity, and partly distributed as gains to other groups. Social democrats protect profits from revindicative demands of the masses because radical redistributive policies are not in the interest of wage-earners.

This is why social democrats trade-off the abolition of private property of the means of production for cooperation of capitalists in increasing productivity and distributing its gains. This is why social democrats not only attempt to reproduce capitalism but struggle to improve it even against the resistance of capitalists. Nationalization of the means of production has turned out to be electorally unfeasible; radical redistributive policies result in economic crises which are not in the interest of wage-earners; and general affluence can be increased only if capitalists are made to cooperate and wage-earners are continually disciplined to wait.

Crisis and the Workers Government

Social democrats will not lead European societies into socialism. Even if workers would prefer to live under socialism, the process of transition must lead to a crisis before socialism could be organized. To reach higher peaks one must traverse a valley, and this descent will not be completed under democratic conditions.

Suppose that social democrats win elections and attempt to use their position for a democratic transition to socialism. Given the social structure of capitalist societies, such an electoral victory is possible only if support can be obtained from several groups: industrial workers, non-manual employees, petite bourgeoisie, farmers, housewives, retired people, and/or students. Hence pressures for a significant improvement of material conditions erupt from several groups. Wages, particularly the minimal or “vital” wages (*sueldo vital* in Chile, *SMIC* in France), must be increased. Unemployment must be reduced. Transfers, particularly family allowances, must be raised. Credit for small enterprises and farms must become cheaper and available at a higher risk. These demands can be financed by (1) a redistribution of personal incomes (both through direct taxation and a reduction of wage differentials), (2) increased utilization of latent capacity, (3) spending of foreign reserves or borrowing, and/or (4) reduction of the rate of profit. The sum of the first three sources will not be sufficient to satisfy the demands. Redistribution of top incomes does not have much of a quantitative effect, and it cannot reach too far down without threatening the electoral support of salaried employees.

Forced to pay higher wages, and to keep employment beyond the efficient level, capitalists can respond only by increasing the prices of wage goods. Inflation is also fueled by balance of payment difficulties resulting from the necessity to import wage goods and from speculative pressures. Hence, either an inflationary dynamic sets into motion or, if prices are controlled, scarcities appear, a black market is organized, and so on. Eventually nominal wage increases become eroded, as they were in France in 1936, in Chile and in Portugal.

Under normal circumstances it can be expected that the increase of aggregate demand should stimulate investment and employment. Redistributive measures, even if they include inorganic emission, are usually justified not only by appeals to justice but also to efficiency. As lower incomes increase, so does the demand for wage goods. The utilization of latent capacity and foreign reserves are seen as a cushion that would protect prices from increased demand during the short period before investment picks up and eventually when supply rises. It is expected that profits from a larger volume of sales will be reinvested and thus the economy will be stimulated to develop at a faster pace. This was, for example, the Vuskovic programme in Chile – not at all unreasonable under normal circumstances.

Such a program cannot be successful, however, when economic demands grow spontaneously and when they are accompanied by structural transformations. Wage demands are likely to become confiscatory under such circumstances, and capitalists expect that these demands will be enforced, or at least condoned, by the government. Measures of nationalization, distribution of land, and monopolization of credit and foreign exchange by the state threaten the very institution of private profit. Under such circumstances, rational private capitalists will not invest. A transition to socialism must therefore generate an economic crisis. Investment falls sharply, prices increase, nominal wage gains become eroded, and eventually output falls, demand slackens, unemployment reappears as a major problem. What is not possible is thus the programme articulated by Allende when he said that “the political model toward socialism that my government is applying requires that the socio-economic revolution take place simultaneously with an uninterrupted economic expansion.” What is not possible is the realization of Blum’s belief “that a better distribution ... would revive production at the same time that it would satisfy justice”. What is not possible is a transition to socialism that begins with “*une augmentation substantielle des salaires et traitement.*”

Faced with an economic crisis, threatened with loss of electoral support, concerned about the possibility of a fascist counter-revolution, social democrats abandon the project of transition or at least pause to wait for more auspicious times. They find the courage to explain to the working class

that it is better to be exploited than to create a situation which contains the risk of turning against them. They refuse to stake their fortunes on a worsening of the crisis. They offer the compromise; they maintain and defend it. The question which remains is whether there exists a way to escape the alternative defined for the Left by Olof Palme: “Either to return to Stalin and Lenin, or take the road that joins the tradition of social democracy”.

Epilogue

In the twentieth century, communism was not merely an idea. It was a massive undertaking, embodied in socialist- and anarchist-affiliated unions and parties, communist newspapers and cultural associations, as well as revolutionary organizations of every sort. We say that this undertaking was the real movement of modern history. That's because – since its founding in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – the history of capitalism has largely been the history of revolutionary attempts to abolish it.

We must say “attempts” because, of all the anti-capitalist revolutions that took place, all of them failed to hit their mark. Each and every one ended in a further deepening of market relations. Nevertheless, these revolutions altered the course of modern history. In specific ways, they shaped the sort of capitalist world in which we live today.

First and foremost, workers' struggles carried forward the project of bourgeois liberalism – far beyond what the bourgeoisie was willing or able to do. Workers fought to extend the vote (although more fervently for men than women) and to bring an end to the privileges of “throne and altar”. In supporting anti-colonial struggles, socialists and communists carried the nation-state model to the ends of the earth. Thus, the defeat of the old regime – ruled by kings and aristocrats, imperial overseers and priests – was achieved not by industrialists, but by armed battalions of peasants and workers.

In completing the project of bourgeois liberalism, socialists and communists also transformed it. They hailed fraternity as the condition of liberty and equality. Social solidarity was supposed to free us, not only in the negative sense of being unconstrained, but also in the positive sense of having the power to realize oneself in the world.

Towards that end, revolutionaries fought to increase the power of workers' collectivities. There was much internal struggle over whether workers' power should be extended directly, in the form of greater autonomy on the shopfloor and in the neighborhood, or whether workers should entrust themselves to powerful representatives. Except in times of heightened social struggle, it was almost always the representative tendency that won. Nevertheless, as a result of these struggles, aspects of social reproduction (housing, health care, and education) were insulated from markets. Wage determination and working conditions were regulated. As a consequence, workers' collectivities, or at least their representatives, were strengthened. Economic inequalities were reduced, since some workers – mostly white and male, but not always – were able to win regular wage increases.

Yet, from the very beginning of the twentieth century, questions were raised about the ultimate aim of the labor movement (and above all, by anarchists and assorted anarcho-syndicalists, although they are not represented in this volume). Were economic and political reforms leading in a revolutionary direction, even potentially, or did they merely extend the domination of capital, albeit with a human face? Especially in the aftermath of the World War II, the latter seemed more

likely to be true. That the USSR – in claiming to represent the interests of the international working class – could violently suppress working-class revolt across Eastern Europe appeared to be a tragic betrayal of revolutionary ideals. Some went even further, asking whether the USSR’s interventions could be understood as a betrayal at all, or whether socialism had turned out to be merely another name for capitalist forms of domination.

Historical developments thus forced revolutionaries to call into question the received wisdom of the Second and Third Internationals. Was it enough to abolish competitive markets and to replace them with the state-planned economy? Did state planning conserve relations of domination, especially that of bureaucrats over peasants and workers? In the postwar period, it seemed clear that markets were not simply opposed to planning. Capital thrived under a mixed economy, in which capitalist markets were paired with extensive social engineering and urban planning (which brought with them their own insidious forms of domination). Under these conditions, what could be the content of communism?

On the margins of the labor movement, many reflected on the nature of alienation, which remained formally the same regardless of the level of wages. Heretical theorists revived the notion of the revolution as workers’ autonomy: as self-activity, self-direction, and self-organization. Some questioned whether it was right to think of the revolution as a liberation of labor. Perhaps it was, instead, a matter of a liberation from work. New ideas about the nature of communism, and so also of capitalism, were born in the turbulent struggles of the late 1960s and 70s. They were accompanied by new readings of Karl Marx, which challenged the Stalinist orthodoxy (and beyond that, even questioned whether Engles could be trusted as a faithful interpreter of Marx’s work).

However, this revolutionary efflorescence, which Dauvé called the “re-emergence” of the communist movement, was short-lived. In the mid-1970s, the so-called “Golden Age” of postwar capitalism came to an end. Economies grew more slowly and unstably. Factories closed. Wages stagnated. Unemployment expanded. However, the return of capitalism’s crisis tendencies did not push the labor movement in a revolutionary direction. Instead, the labor movement was routed. Social democrats and union bureaucrats found themselves fighting permanently on the back foot. “Reforms” no longer constrained markets; instead, they freed markets from regulation. Meanwhile, Third World alternatives collapsed, one after another, in a wave of debt crises and structural adjustment programs. Finally, communist regimes themselves collapsed, as in Russia, or otherwise transitioned to more free-market forms of capitalism, as in China and Vietnam.

In some ways, the world looks ever more like Karl Kautsky and other early twentieth-century socialists expected it would. Economic growth promotes, not the end of poverty, but rather, growing inequality. A sizable portion of the population subsists as a “slum proletariat”. Formal wage-relations are giving way to informal markets. Personal forms of domination, backed by the armed force of a militarized police, are proliferating. Meanwhile, as a growing portion of the population recognizes, endless economic growth threatens to destroy the conditions of human life on Earth. The paradox is that self-destruction of capitalism has been accompanied by the more or less wholesale defeat of the labor movement.

Of course, that isn’t to say that the movement to abolish the present state of things has come to an end. The last several years have seen massive protests break out in every corner of the world, under a number of different names: the Arab Spring; the Indignados, Occupy, and so on. From Tunis to London to Oakland and New York, sections of the population are challenging policies of austerity, implemented by technocratic governments, acting in the interests of a wealthy, transnational capitalist class. While these protests do not constitute a threat to capitalist social relations, in and of themselves, they suggest that we now live in a time of rising social antagonism – even if that

antagonism does not place itself under the familiar signs of twentieth-century labor movements. We want to know whether social struggles today might make it possible to raise, once again, the question of communism, as something other than an idea.

It is in this context that we are trying to revive an interest in revolutionary theory. We do so, not in the name of a hopeless historical revivalism. Indeed, we are not members of any of the present-day clubs for historical re-enactment, whatever their putative affiliation. Nevertheless, we must recognize that the social struggles of the past put revolution on the agenda, even if their revolution differs markedly from anything we could imagine to be our own. How does one make a revolution against capitalism? How could such a thing ever come about? And what is communism? What would it mean to fight for freedom from domination, as something other than fantasy of rational planning and social harmony?

These are the questions we are asking ourselves, today. We hope this reader contributes, if not any answers, than at least to a more thorough line of questions.

Further Reading

Many texts in this reader comprised only selections of an original work. For further reading, of course, one could look up the complete text. Either Marxists Internet Archive or libcom.org is likely to have the original.

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Appendix

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Volume I: European Socialism and Communism

Volume II: Black Revolutionaries in the United States

Volume III: Revolutionary Feminism

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