

# **THE MACHINE AND ITS DISCONTENTS**

**A FREDY PERLMAN ANTHOLOGY**



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**A FREDY PERLMAN ANTHOLOGY**

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With thanks to Lorraine Perlman

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Page 10: *A Modern Ziggurat*.

Page 78: *The Old Regime*.

Page 140: Untitled.

Page 192: *Leader, Cadre, Liberated Masses*.

Page 228: Untitled



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## Introduction

– The only -ist name I respond to is “cellist.”

Of the generation that came of age through the turbulent events of 1968, Fredy Perlman is certainly an individual that shines brightly. Perlman's journey into radical politics began in Los Angeles in the summer of 1953 when, at the age of 19, he began working at the *Daily Bruin* – the student newspaper of the University of California. At the time Senator McCarthy's anti-communist 'Red Scare' was in full swing and its repression was focussing on the circles in which Perlman moved. The paper's pro civil liberties outlook, that ridiculed the paranoia of the era and gave a voice to those persecuted by the state, caused it to be out of favour with the authorities. The establishment press mounted a smear campaign against the *Daily Bruin*, claiming that under its influence the university had become a “little red school-house”. In December 1954 new regulations were imposed on the newspaper. All five editors and the majority of their co-workers promptly resigned. Perlman and other former staff tried to set up an alternative paper, though in the end economic pressures led to the closure of the project after only a few issues. None of the *Daily Bruin* editors had been working on behalf of any radical party or ideology, in fact they had divergent political views but all were committed to serious journalism and were not easily intimidated by the authorities. The experience led Perlman to hold a permanent suspicion against institutional authority and those who upheld it.

In 1963 Fredy Perlman and his wife Lorraine left America and headed to Europe. Perlman applied for a student visa in the country

of his birth, Czechoslovakia (which he had fled as a young child with his parents in 1938 ahead of the Nazi invasion), but his application was rejected. He studied at Belgrade University until 1966 where he received a PhD for a dissertation focussing on Kosovo which was entitled, *Conditions for the Development of a Backward Region*.

In May '68 after lecturing in Turin, Italy, Perlman caught a train to Paris arriving just before the railways were shut down by a strike-wave that was sweeping the country. The experiences of the following weeks would have a deep effect on his subsequent views and would remain a benchmark whenever he considered the potentials of social movements in the future. Perlman participated in a student-worker action committee at the Sorbonne, which had been occupied by its students. They held discussions and attempted to form links and communicate with the auto workers who worked and lived in the suburbs of Paris. Official union bureaucrats were not open to the possibility of 'their' strike being taken away from them, and as the more radical perspectives coming from the committees could not be co-opted into the usual demands around pay and conditions they tried to isolate the striking factory workers from the ideas that the activists were disseminating. Factory gates were kept locked and union officials attempted to mediate all communication with the workers on the inside. On one occasion, Perlman and a group of activists were arrested for trespassing after they had climbed the gates of a suburban factory. In court, Perlman declared that he was an American professor and that the action was part of his research on French labour unions. Though no doubt skeptical, the judge dropped the charges. It was during these intense event filled weeks that Perlman came across ideas and histories that would influence him over the following decade: the political critiques of the Situationist International, anarchism and the history of the Spanish Revolution, and the council communists.

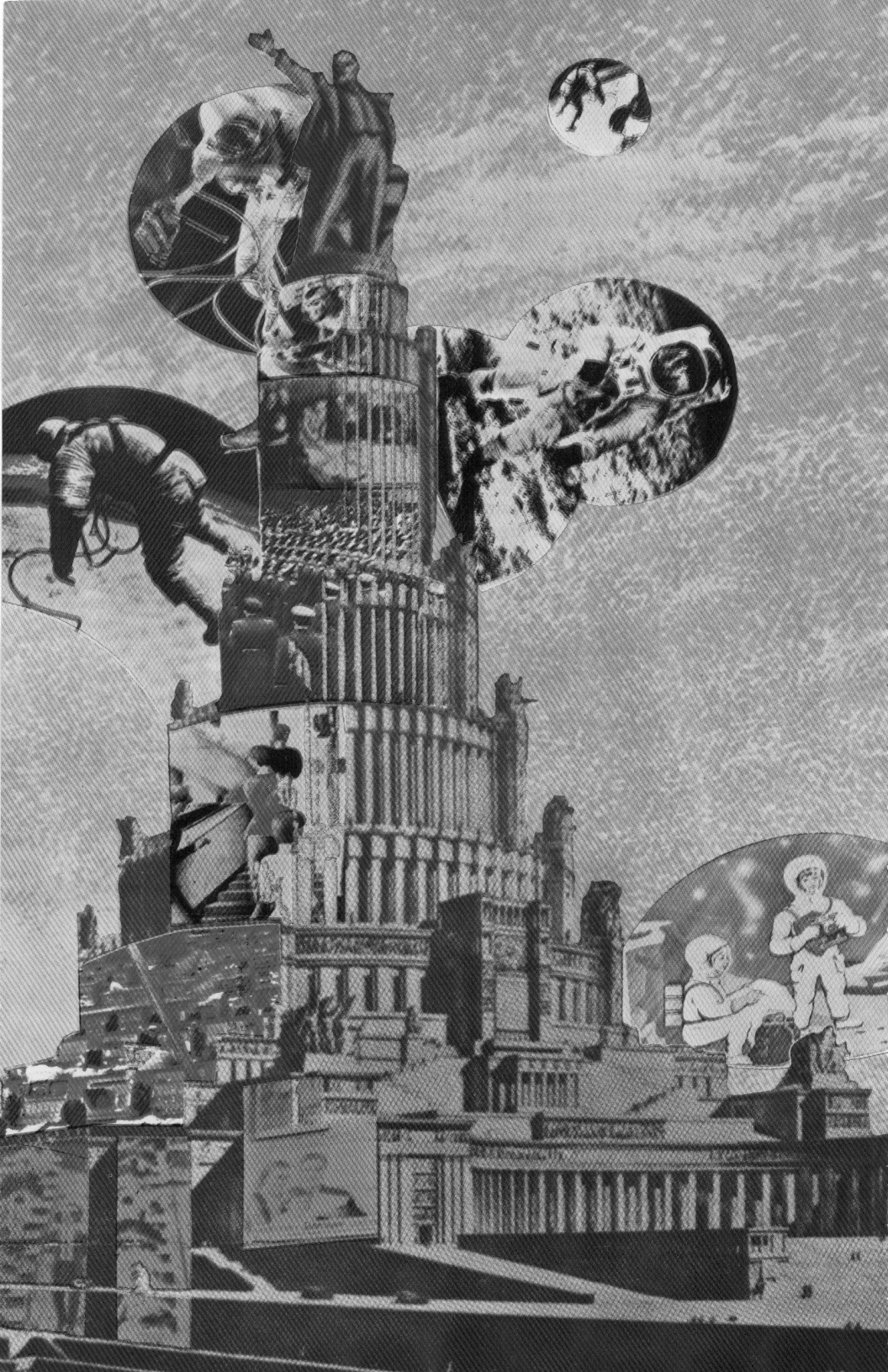
Returning to the US, he began the publishing project *Black & Red*. Initially operating out of Kalamazoo, Michigan, it's first publications were in the form of a periodical which ran for six and a half issues. In 1969 the project moved to Detroit and took part in the establishment of a printing co-op that would print further *Black & Red* titles as well as numerous other pamphlets and books for other community and radical

groups. As a part of *Black & Red*, Perlman was responsible for co-translating and making available to an English speaking audience many important texts of the left-libertarian movement including Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, Voline's *The Unknown Revolution*, Jacques Camatte's *The Wandering of Humanity*, I.I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, and Jean Barrot & Francois Martin's *The Eclipse and Re-emergence of the Communist Movement*.

As time went on the fading hopes from '68 that 'anything can happen', coupled with a rising concern with plight of the environment, led to Perlman to drift away from his earlier positions and to become more concerned with questioning the Western notions of 'civilisation' and 'progress'. It is these later writings for which he is probably best known, his book *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!* remains highly influential in anarchist-primitivist circles. How well his writings from this later period sit with those from his earlier life will be left for the reader to decide. However, as Ken Knabb, English language translator of the texts of the Situationist International, has perceptively noted – perhaps Perlman pre-emptively provided a self-critique in an earlier book he had written about his former teacher C. Wright Mills, *The Incoherence of the Intellectual*:

Yet even though Mills rejects the passivity with which men accept their own fragmentation, he no longer struggles against it. The coherent self-determined man becomes an exotic creature who lived in a distant past and in extremely different material circumstances . . . The main drift is no longer the program of the right which can be opposed by the program of the left; it is now an external spectacle which follows its course like a disease . . . The rift between theory and practice, thought and action, widens; political ideals can no longer be translated into practical projects.

On July 26th 1985 Perlman underwent heart surgery for a condition he had developed in his childhood. His was unable to recover from the operation and passed away in hospital at the age of 50. Up to the time of his death he had continued working on projects for *Black & Red*.



**PART ONE:**  
**WORKER-STUDENT UPRISINGS**

## Anything Can Happen

This text was published in issue one of *Black & Red*. It illustrates Perlman's hopes and aspirations of the time.

"Be Realists,  
Demand the Impossible!"

This slogan, developed in May by revolutionaries in France, flies in the face of common sense, especially the "common sense" of American corporate-military propaganda. What happened in May also flies in the face of official American "common sense." In fact, in terms of American "common sense," much of what happens in the world every day is impossible. It can't happen. If it does happen, then the official "common sense" is nonsense: it is a set of myths and fantasies. But how can common sense be nonsense? That's impossible.

To demonstrate that anything is possible, this essay will place some of the myths alongside some of the events. The essay will then try to find out why some of the myths are possible, in other words, it will explore the "scientific basis" of the myths. The essay, if successful, will thus show that anything is possible: it's even possible for a population to take myths for common sense, and it's possible for mythmakers to convince themselves of the reality of their myths in the face of reality itself.

### American "Common Sense"

– It's impossible for people to run their own lives; that's why they don't have the power to do so. People are powerless because they have neither the ability nor the desire to control and decide about the social and material conditions in which they live.



– People only want power and privileges over each other. It would be impossible, for example, for university students to fight against the institution which assures them a privileged position. Those students who study do so to get high grades, because with the high grades they can get high-paying jobs, which means the ability to manage and manipulate other people, and the ability to buy more consumer goods than other people. If learning were not rewarded with high grades, high pay, power over others and lots of goods, no one would learn; there'd be no motivation for learning.

– It would be just as impossible for workers to want to run their factories, to want to decide about their production. All that workers are interested in is wages: they just want more wages than others have, so as to buy bigger houses, more cars and longer trips.

– Even if students, workers, farmers wanted something different, they're obviously satisfied with what they're doing, otherwise they wouldn't be doing it.

– In any case, those who aren't satisfied can freely express their dissatisfaction by buying and by voting: they don't have to buy the things they don't like, and they don't have to vote for the candidates they don't like. It's impossible for them to change their situation any other way.

– Even if some people tried to change the situation some other way, it would be impossible for them to get together; they'd only fight each other, because white workers are racists, black nationalists are anti-white, feminists are against all men, and students have their own specific problems.

– Even if they did unite, it would obviously be impossible for them to destroy the State and the police and military potential of a powerful industrial society like the United States.

## **The Events**

Millions of students all over the world – in Tokyo, Turin, Belgrade, Berkeley, Berlin, Rome, Rio, Warsaw, New York, Paris – are fighting for the power to control and decide about the social and material conditions in which they live. They are not stopped either by the lack of desire, or by the lack of ability; they are stopped by cops. Perhaps

they're inspired by other fighters who held on against cops: the Cubans, the Vietnamese...

Students in Turin and Paris, for example, occupied their universities and formed general assemblies in which all the students made all the decisions. In other words, the students started running their own universities. Not in order to get better grades: they did away with tests. Not in order to get higher paying jobs or more privileges: they started to discuss the abolition of privileges and high paying jobs; they started to discuss putting an end to the society in which they had to sell themselves. And at that point, sometimes for the first time in their lives, they started learning.

In Paris young workers, inspired by the example of the students, occupied an aircraft factory and locked up the director. The examples multiplied. Other workers began to occupy their factories. Despite the fact that all life long they had depended on someone to make their decisions for them, some workers set up committees to discuss running the strike on their own terms, letting all workers decide, and not just on the union's terms- – and some workers set up commissions to discuss running the factories themselves. An idea which it's pointless to think about in normal times, because it's absurd, it's impossible, had suddenly become possible, and it became interesting, challenging, fascinating. Workers even began to talk about producing goods merely because people needed them. These workers knew that it was "false to think that the population is against free public services, that farmers are in favor of a commercial circuit stuffed with intermediaries, that poorly paid people are satisfied, that 'managers' are proud of their privileges."<sup>1</sup> Some electronics workers freely distributed equipment to demonstrators protecting themselves from the police; some farmers delivered free food to striking workers; and some armaments workers talked about distributing weapons to all workers, so that the workers could protect themselves from the national army and police.

In spite of a lifetime of business propaganda about how "satisfied" workers are with the cars, houses and other objects they receive in exchange for their living energy, workers expressed their "satisfaction"

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1 Mouvement du 22 mars, *Ce n'est qu'un debut, Continuons le combat*, Paris: Maspéro, 1968.

through a general strike which paralyzed all French industry for over a month. After being trained for a lifetime to “respect law and order,” workers broke all the laws by occupying factories which don’t “belong” to them because, they quickly learned, the cops are there to see to it that the factories continue to “belong” to capitalist owners. The workers learned that “law and order” is what keeps them from running their own productive activity, and that “law and order” is what they’d have to destroy in order to rule their own society. The cops came out as soon as workers acted on their dissatisfaction. Perhaps the workers had known all along about the cops in the background; perhaps that’s why the workers had seemed so “satisfied.” With a gun pointing at his back, almost any intelligent person would be “satisfied” to hold his hands up.

Workers in Paris and elsewhere began to accept the students’ invitation to come to the University of Paris auditoriums (at the Sorbonne, Censier, Halle-aux-vins, Beaux Arts, etc.) to talk about abolishing money relations and turning the factories into social services run by those who make and those who use the products. Workers began to express themselves. That’s when the owners and their administrators threatened civil war, and an enormous police and military machine was deployed to make the threat real. With this crass display of the “forces of law and order,” the king stood momentarily naked: the repressive dictatorship of the capitalist class was visible to all. Whatever illusions people might have had about their own “consumer sovereignty” or “voting power,” whatever fantasies they might have had about transforming capitalist society by buying or voting, they lost them. They knew that their “buying power” and “voting power” simply meant servility and acquiescence in the face of enormous violence. The student revolt and the general strike in France (like the Black Revolt in the U.S., like the anti-imperialist struggle on three continents) had merely forced the ever-present violence to expose itself: this made it possible for people to size up the enemy.

In the face of the violence of the capitalist state, students, French workers, foreign workers, peasants, the well paid and the poorly paid, learned whose interests they had served by policing each other, by fearing and hating each other. In the face of the naked violence of the common oppressor, the divisions among the oppressed disappeared:

students ceased to fight for privileges over the workers, and joined the workers; French workers ceased to fight for privileges over the foreign workers, and joined together with the foreign workers; farmers ceased to fight for a special dispensation, and joined the struggle of the workers and the students. Together they began to fight against a single world system that oppresses and divides students from workers, qualified workers from unqualified, French workers from Spanish, black workers from white, “native” workers from “home” workers, colonized peasants from the whole “metropolitan” population.

The struggle in France did not destroy the political and military power of capitalist society. But the struggle did not show that this was impossible:

- Students at a demonstration in Paris knew they could not defend themselves from a police charge, but some students didn’t run from the police; they started building a barricade. This was what the March 22 Movement called an “exemplary action”: a large number of students took courage, didn’t run from the cops, and began building barricades.

- Students knew that they could not, by themselves, destroy the state and its repressive apparatus, yet they occupied and started running the universities, and in the streets they returned the cops’ volley of teargas with a volley of cobblestones. This too was an exemplary action: workers in a number of factories took courage, occupied their factories, and were ready to defend them from their “owners.”

- The first workers who occupied their factories in order to take them over and start running them knew that they could not destroy the power of the capitalist class unless all workers took over their factories and defended them by destroying the state and its repressive power, yet they occupied the factories. This too was an exemplary action, but these workers did not succeed in communicating the example to the rest of the workers: the government, the press, and the unions told the rest of the population that the occupying workers were merely having a traditional strike to get higher wages and better working conditions from the state and the factory owners.

Impossible? All this happened in a two-week period at the end of May. The examples were extremely contagious. Is anyone really sure

that those who produce weapons, namely workers, or even that cops and soldiers, who are also workers, are immune?

### **“Scientific Basis” Of The “Common Sense”**

A “social scientist” is someone who is paid to defend this society’s myths. His defense mechanism, in its simplest formulation, runs approximately as follows: He begins by assuming that the society of his time and place is the only possible form of society; he then concludes that some other form of society is impossible. Unfortunately, the “social scientist” rarely admits his assumptions; he usually claims that he doesn’t make any assumptions. And it can’t be said that he’s lying outright: he usually takes his assumptions so much for granted that he doesn’t even know he’s making them.

The “social scientist” takes for granted a society in which there’s a highly developed “division of labor,” which includes both a separation of tasks and a separation (“specialization”) of people. The tasks include such socially useful things as producing food, clothing and houses, and also such socially useless things as brainwashing, manipulating and killing people. To begin with, the “scientist” defines all of these activities as useful, because his society could not run without them. Next, he assumes that these tasks can only be performed if a given person is attached to a given task for life, in other words if the specialized tasks are performed by specialized people. He does not assume this about everything. For example, eating and sleeping are necessary activities; society would break down if these things were not performed. Yet even the “social scientist” does not think that a handful of people should do all the eating while the rest don’t eat, or that a handful of people should do all the sleeping while the rest don’t sleep at all. He assumes the need for specialization only about those activities which are specialized in his particular society. In the corporate-military society, a few people have all the political power, the rest have none; a handful of people decide what to produce, and the rest consume it; a handful of people decide what kinds of houses to build, and the rest live in them; a handful of people decide what to teach in classrooms, and the rest swallow it; a handful of people create and the rest are passive; a handful of people perform and the rest are spectators. In short, a handful of people have

all the power over a specific activity, and the rest of the people have no power over it even when they are directly affected by it. And obviously the people who have no power over a specific activity do not know what to do with such power: they won't even start learning what to do with it until they have it. From this the "scientist" concludes that people have neither the ability nor the desire to have such power, namely to control and decide about the social and material conditions in which they live. More straightforwardly, the argument says: people do not have such power in this society, and this society is the only form of society; therefore it's impossible for people to have such power. In still simpler terms: People can't have such power because they don't have it.

Logic is not taught much in American schools, and the argument looks impressive when it is accompanied by an enormous statistical apparatus and extremely complicated geometrical designs. If a critic insists on calling the argument simplistic and circular, he's turned off as soon as the "scientist" pulls out figures calculated on computers inaccessible to the public, and he's turned out as soon as the "scientist" starts "communicating" in a completely esoteric language which has all the logical fallacies built-in, but which is comprehensible only to "scientific colleagues."

Mythological conclusions based on mythological assumptions are "proved" by means of the statistics and the charts; much of "applied social science" consists of teaching young people what kind of "data" to gather in order to make the conclusions come out, and much of "theory" consists of fitting this data to the pre-established formulas. By means of numerous techniques, for example, it can be "proved" that workers would rather have high paying jobs than enjoyable or meaningful jobs, that people "like" what they hear on the radio or see on television, that people are "members" of one or another Judeo-Christian cult, that almost anyone votes either for Democrats or for Republicans. Students are taught one set of methods for gathering the data, a second set for arranging them, a third set for presenting them, and "theories" for interpreting them. The apologetic content of the "data" is covered up by its statistical sophistication. In a society where eating depends on getting paid, and thus where doing "meaningful work" may mean one doesn't get paid, a worker's preference for high paying over meaningful

jobs merely means he'd rather eat than not eat. In a society where people do not create and control what they hear on the radio or see on television, they have no choice but to "like" what they hear and see, or else to turn the damn thing off. People who know their friends would look at them funny if they were atheists prefer to go to one or another Church, and almost anyone who knows he's in a society where he'd lose all his friends as well as his job if he were a socialist or an anarchist obviously prefers to be a Democrat or a Republican. Yet such "data" serves as the basis for the "social scientist's" conception of people's possibilities and impossibilities, and even of their "human nature."

The interviews, polls, and statistical demonstrations about people's religious affiliations, electoral behavior, job preferences, reduce people to monotonous data. In the context of this "science," people are things, they are objects with innumerable qualities-and surprisingly enough, each one of these qualities happens to be served by one or another institution of the corporate-military society. It just so happens that people's "material tastes" are "satisfied" by corporations, that their "physical urges" are "satisfied" by the military, that their "spiritual tendencies" are "satisfied" by the cults, and that their "political preferences" are "satisfied" either by the Republican or by the Democratic party. In other words everything about American corporate-militarism fits people just perfectly.

Everything is tabulated except the fact that a working person serves as a tool, that he sells his living time and creative ability in exchange for objects, that he doesn't decide what to make, nor for whom, nor why.

The "social scientist" claims to be empirical and objective; he claims to make no value judgments. Yet by reducing the person to the bundle of tastes, desires and preferences to which he's restricted in capitalist society, the "objective scientist" makes the bizarre claim that this bundle is what the worker is; and he makes the fantastic value judgment that the worker cannot be other than what he is in capitalist society. According to the "laws of human behavior" of this "science," the solidarity of students with workers, the occupation of factories by workers, the desire of workers to run their own production, distribution and coordination, are all impossible. Why? Because these things are impossible in capitalist society, and for these "scientists" who make no value

judgments, existing societies are the only possible societies, and the corporate-military society is the best of all possible societies.

Given the value judgments of these experts ("who make no value judgments"), everyone in American society must be satisfied. For these valueless "scientists," dissatisfaction is a "value judgment" imported from abroad, for how could anyone not be satisfied in the best of all possible worlds? A person must have "foreign based ideas" if he doesn't recognize this as the best of all possible worlds; he must be unbalanced if he's not satisfied with it; he must be dangerous if he means to act on his dissatisfaction; and he must be removed from his job, starved if possible, and killed if necessary, for the continued satisfaction of the expert.

To the American social scientist, "human nature" is what people do in corporate-military America: a few make decisions and the rest follow orders; some think and others do; some buy other people's labor and the rest sell their own labor, a few invest and the rest are consumers; some are sadists and others masochists; some have a desire to kill and others to die. The "scientist" passes all this off as "exchange," as "reciprocity," as a "division of labor" in which people are divided along with tasks. To the "social scientist" this is all so natural that he thinks he makes no value judgments when he takes it all for granted. Corporations and the military even give him grants to show that it's always been this way: grants to demonstrate that this "human nature" is lodged in the beginning of history and in the depths of the unconscious. (American psychologists – especially "behaviorists" – make the ambiguous "contribution" of demonstrating that animals also have a "human nature" – the psychologists drive rats mad in a situation similar to a war which the psychologists themselves helped plan, and then they show that rats, too, have a desire to kill, that they have masochist tendencies.)

Given this conception of "human nature," the strength of the corporate-military system does not reside in the potential violence of its army and police, but in the fact that the corporate-military system is consistent with human nature.

In terms of what the American "social scientist" takes for granted, when students and workers in France started to fight to do away with "reciprocity," "exchange," and the division of labor, they were not



fighting against the capitalist police, but against “human nature.” And since this is obviously impossible, the events that took place in May, 1968, did not take place.

### **“Common Sense” Explodes**

The question of what is possible cannot be answered in terms of what is. The fact that “human nature” is hierarchic in a hierarchic society does not mean that a hierarchic division of people among different tasks is necessary for social life.

It is not the capitalist institutions which satisfy human needs. It is the working people of capitalist society who shape themselves to fit the institutions of capitalist society.

When some people buy labor and others sell it, each fights to sell himself at the highest price, each fights to convince the buyer and himself that the next person is worth less.

In such a society, students who prepare to sell themselves as high-salaried managers and manipulators must tell their buyers and themselves that, as “professionals,” they’re superior to non-University manual workers.

In such a society, WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) workers who sell themselves for higher-paying, easier jobs, frantically tell themselves and their buyers that they’re better, work harder, and are more deserving than foreigners, Catholics, Jews, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and Blacks; black “professionals” tell themselves that they’re better than black manual workers; all whites tell themselves they’re better than all blacks; and all Americans tell themselves they’re better than South American, Asian or African “natives.” Since WASPS systematically succeed in selling themselves at the highest price, everyone below tries to make himself as much a WASP as possible. (WASPS happen to be the traditional ruling class. If midgets systematically got the highest price, everyone below would try to be a midget.)

To keep its relative privileges, each group tries to keep the groups below from shaking the structure.

Thus in times of “peace” the system is largely self-policed: the colonized repress the colonized, blacks repress blacks, whites repress each other, the blacks, and the colonized. Thus the working population

represses itself, “law and order” is maintained, and the ruling class is saved from further outlays on the repressive apparatus.

To the “social scientist” and the professional propagandist, this “division of labor” is as natural as “human nature” itself. Unity among the different “interest groups” is as inconceivable to the “social scientist” as revolution.

While holding as “scientifically proved” that the different groups cannot unite in an anti-capitalist struggle, the expert does all he can to prevent such unity, and his colleagues design weapons just in case people did unite against the capitalist system.

Because sometimes the whole structure cracks.

The same expert who defines the capitalist system as consistent with “human nature,” with people’s tastes, wishes, desires, constructs the arsenal of myths and weapons with which the system defends itself. But what does the system defend itself against: human nature? If it has to fight against human nature to survive, then by the expert’s own language, the system is extremely unnatural.

Thus while some experts define the rebellion in France as impossible because unnatural, their expert colleagues design the incapacitating gases with which cops can suppress such impossible rebellions. BECAUSE ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

## **Worker-Student Action Committees**

This text, written by Fredy Perlman and Roger Gregoire, was printed in Kalamazoo as a pamphlet in the spring of 1969. It is an account and evaluation of experiences the pair had shared in Paris in May and June of 1968 while members of the Citroën Worker-Student Action Committee. This excerpt is part two of the pamphlet.

### **Evaluation and Critique**

#### **Limits of the Escalation**

Why did we participate in the worker-student action committees? What did we think was happening when the general strike began? What was the basis for what we thought?

Students had ceased to accept the state and academic authorities within the universities. Regularly controlled and managed by the state, and in this sense “state property,” the universities were transformed into “social” institutions, where the students determined what was to be done, what was to be discussed, who was to make the decisions and the rules.

At numerous general assemblies, people expressed the awareness that, if the universities were to remain in the hands of people who gathered there, workers had to take control of the factories. In fact, people went to factories to say to workers: “We’ve taken over the universities. For this to be permanent, you have to take over the factories.” Some workers began to “imitate” the student movement independently. At Renault, for example, the strike began before the “students” went there. This is also true of Sud-Aviation. At several other factories, young workers who had joined the students on the barricades began to follow the “example” of the universities by calling for strikes and eventual take-overs of the factories by their workers.

Yet this is where the first critique has to be made. We had not, in fact, understood the full significance of the “model” of the university occupations, and consequently our perspective of “general assemblies in the factories” did not have the basis we thought it had.

What had happened in the universities was that students, workers and others had taken over state buildings, and assumed for themselves the power formerly wielded by the state. However, they did not “reorganize” or “restructure” the university; they did not substitute a “student-run” university for the state-run university; they did not reform the capitalist university. The occupations did not establish “student-power” in the universities; students did not elect or appoint a new administration, this time a student-bureaucracy, to run the university in the place of the state bureaucracy. In fact, the occupants of the universities rejected the traditional student bureaucracy, the student union (National Union of French Students – UNEF).

What is even more important is that “students” did not “take over” the universities. At the Sorbonne, at Censier, at Nanterre and elsewhere, the university was proclaimed social property; the occupied buildings became exuniversities. The buildings were opened to the entire society – to students, teachers, workers – to anyone who wanted to come in. Furthermore, the ex-universities were run by their occupants, whether or not they were students, workers, townspeople. At Censier, in fact, the majority of the occupants were not “students.” This socialization was accompanied by a break-down of the division of labor, the division between “intellectuals” and “workers.” In other words, the occupation represented an abolition of the university as a specialized institution restricted to a special layer of society (students). The ex-university becomes socialized, public, open to everyone.

The general assemblies in the universities were instances of self-organization by the people inside of a specific building, whatever their former specializations. They were not instances of self-organization by students over “their own” affairs.

However, this is as far as the “escalation” went. When the people who organized their activities inside an occupied university went to “the workers,” either on the barricades, or in the factories, and when they said to “the workers”: “YOU should take over YOUR factories,”

they showed a complete lack of awareness about what they were already doing in the ex-universities.

In the ex-universities, the division between “students” and “workers” was abolished in action, in the daily practice of the occupants; there were no special “student tasks” and “worker tasks.” However, the action went further than the consciousness. By going to “the workers” people saw the workers as a specialized sector of society, they accepted the division of labor.

The escalation had gone as far as the formation of general assemblies of sections of the population inside the occupied universities. The occupants organized their own activities.

However, the people who “socialized” the universities did not see the factories as SOCIAL means of production; they did not see that these factories have not been created by the workers employed there, but by generations of working people. All they did see, since this is visible on the surface, is that the capitalists do not do the producing but the workers. But this is an illusion. Renault, for example, is not in any sense the “product” of the workers employed at Renault; it’s the product of generations of people (not merely in France) including miners, machine producers, food producers, researchers, engineers. To think that the Renault auto plants “belong” to the people who work there today is an illusion. Yet this was the fiction accepted by people who had rejected specialization and “property” in the occupied universities.

The “revolutionaries,” who had transformed universities into public places and consequently no one’s property, were not aware of the SOCIAL character of the factories. What they contested was the “subject” who controlled the property, the “owner.” The conception of the “revolutionaries” was that “Renault workers should run the factories instead of the state bureaucrats; Citroën workers should run Citroën instead of the capitalist owners.” In other words, private and state property are to be transformed to group property: Citroën is to become the property of the workers employed at Citroën. And since this “corporation” of workers does not exist in a vacuum, it has to establish machinery to relate to other, “external” corporations of workers. Consequently they have to set up an administration, a bureaucracy, which “represents” the workers of a particular plant. One

element of this corporatist conception was affected by the “model” of the occupied universities. Just as the student union was rejected as the “spokesman” for the university occupants, the traditional union (the General Confederation of Labor) was rejected as the “spokesman” for the incorporated workers: “the workers should not be represented by the CGT; they should be represented by themselves,” namely by a new, democratically elected bureaucracy.

Thus even in the perspectives of the university occupants, the factories were not to be socialized. Thus “General Assemblies” inside the factories did not have the same meaning as in the universities. The factories were to become group property, like Yugoslav enterprises. Such enterprises are not socially controlled; they are run by bureaucracies inside each enterprise.

By fighting the Gaullist police in the streets, people contested the legitimacy of this power over their lives. By occupying a building like Censier, they contested the legitimacy of the bureaucrats who controlled this “public institution.” People occupied Censier whether or not they had ever been students there; no one acted as if Censier “belonged” to those students who were enrolled for courses there. But the same logic was not applied to the factories. People did not go to Renault or Citroën saying, “This doesn’t belong to the capitalist, or to the state, and it doesn’t belong to the CGT either! Furthermore it doesn’t belong to a new bureaucracy that someone might set up. It belongs to the people, which includes us. Renault is ours. And we’re going in. First of all we want to see what it is, and then we’ll figure out what to do with it.”

In May it was certainly possible for ten thousand people to go to Renault and occupy it. More than ten thousand did in fact demonstrate their “solidarity” with the workers of Renault, and they walked from the center of Paris to the Renault plant at Billancourt. But the dominant idea was that the workers who are employed there have to decide what happens inside the factory. The demonstrators accepted the most important regularity of capitalist life: they accepted property, they merely wanted a new owner.

(A small number of workers from a chemical plant did go to Censier to invite “outsiders” into the factory, but their invitation did not have

consequences, and was even opposed by “revolutionary” arguments like “We would be substituting ourselves for the workers.”)

The idea that “the means of production belong to the working people” was translated to mean that the workers own the particular factory they work in. This is an extreme vulgarization. Such an interpretation would mean that the particular activity to which the wage struggle condemned someone in capitalist society is the activity to which they will be condemned when the society is transformed. What if someone who works in the auto plant wants to paint, farm, fly or do research rather than assembly line car production? A revolution would mean that workers, at that moment, would go all over the society, and it is doubtful that many of them would return to the particular car factory that capitalism had condemned them to work in.

The “idea” of workers’ councils does not necessarily imply that workers will be tied to a particular factory for life, in the sense that the workers “belong” to the factory that “belongs” to them. What the “idea” suggests is that all the workers will rule social production. However, in May and June there were no actions in this direction; the statements addressed to workers explicitly said: “Workers, form general assemblies in YOUR factories; form workers’ councils in YOUR factories,” which is an automatic transplantation of the Yugoslav model.

The student movement was impregnated with historical examples of “workers’ councils” in Russia, Germany, Spain, Hungary and Yugoslavia. A tactic by which workers in one factory can effectively oppose the factory bureaucracy was transformed into a “revolutionary program.” The “workers’ councils” were to be created inside the factories by the workers themselves, the same way that the occupations had been carried out by the students.

However, what happened on May 15 was that a “wildcat strike” broke out, namely an event which is within the bounds of activity that takes place in capitalist society. The wildcat strike degenerated into a bureaucratic strike because of the failure of the revolutionary movement to “escalate” or overflow into the factories. The militants did not have perspectives for passing from a wildcat strike, from a rebellion against authority, to the liberation of daily life. In a few days the strike was taken over by the union bureaucracy, and in this sense was not

even a successful wildcat strike. This missing step between the student struggle and the general strike effectively closed this route of escalation: the student movement did not “escalate” into a movement within the factories.

Perhaps, after the outbreak of the strike, there still remained possibilities for escalation, possibilities for a further step in the direction of transforming daily life. People were still fighting. With ten million workers on strike and thousands of people on the streets every day, the escalation might have taken the form of a systematic attempt to destroy the state apparatus. The orientation of the movement was anti-statist; the state ran the universities and its power had been abolished. There had been an “escalation” until May 10. Students communicated their intentions to other students in the street. And their intentions were very specific. On May 10 they were determined to take back their university. They had the support of the majority of students, of young workers who joined them in the street, and of the people in the neighborhood (the Latin Quarter). However, after May 10, a series of small demonstrations “reproduce” the demonstration and struggle of May 10, and no longer constitute “escalations” of the struggle. Thousands of people participate in these actions; there are constant confrontations with the police. But there is no longer the determination to take control over an essential activity.

For example, the state power, which did not dare send its army or police anywhere between May 16 and May 20, was using a small group of cops to broadcast the news all over France. The state broadcast its “news” from a tower with a few cops in front of it, and everyone in France knew that lies were being broadcast (for example, that workers were striking for their union demands, and that students were anxious to take their tests).

The people in the universities and in the streets, as well as the striking workers, really needed to communicate with the rest of the population, merely to describe what they had done and were doing. Yet in this situation, where the “relation of forces” was on the side of the population and not the state (in the view of both sides), when “revolutionaries” thought they had already won and the government thought it had already gone under – in this situation, between May 16 and May



20, all that happened about the lack of information was that people whispered about it in the street, and some vaguely said “we should take over the national radio station.”

On May 22, a group of mini-bureaucrats who saw their chance to organize “The Revolutionary Party,” called “official delegates” of all action committees to a meeting which was to plan the next “grand” demonstration. The nature of the demonstration had, in fact, been planned before the meeting took place; the delegates were gathered together to help the bureaucrats think up “slogans”. And what had been decided was that, on May 24, another show of force was to take place, in front of a railroad station; it had also been decided that the only difference between this demonstration and earlier ones would be the slogans. But there was no longer a need to show those in power that “we are strong.” In other words, this was not to be a transformation of reality, of the activities of daily life; it was to be a transformation of slogans (namely words, and ultimately, if the words “caught on,” then the ideas in people’s heads would be transformed). The mini-bureaucrats decided not to engage in anything so adventuristic as the occupation of the radio station by sections of the population who were fed up with the ideological repression of the radio. “We’ll be outmanned and we’ll be shot” reasoned the mini-bureaucrats, who were so used to thinking in terms of “revolutionary groups” of twenty or less members confronting the whole police of France that they thought the same way in May. The other “idea” was: “We can’t protect all those people from the police,” an idea which unveils the way these “leaders” think of “their sheep.” The only activity that interested the mini-bureaucrats was to police demonstrators by appointing themselves to the “service of order,” keeping people on the sidewalks, or on the streets, telling demonstrators what to do, dispersing them. So that this route to potential escalation was closed on May 24.

### **Self Organization in General Assemblies**

The general assemblies functioned, at the Sorbonne and at Censier, only when the occupants of the building met to plan a new action, only when they met to organize their own practical activities. If a concrete action was not proposed, the general assembly tended to deteriorate.

At the Sorbonne, for example, the interventions of the March 22 Movement were very important. The militants of M 22 announced what they intended to do, and the people gathered at the general assembly planned their own actions with the knowledge that a concrete action would take place on a specific day. The M 22 militants did not appoint themselves (or get themselves elected) as bureaucrats or spokesmen of the general assemblies; they continued the struggle to liberate themselves, and refused to recognize anyone's right to define or limit the terms of their liberation, whether it was a state bureaucracy or a "revolutionary" bureaucracy consisting of elected "representatives" of a general assembly. When they abdicated this freedom, when M 22 militants allowed the self-appointed presidents of a general assembly to define their action, as in the planning sessions for the May 24 demonstration, the result was not anyone's liberation, but rather the constraint of the entire movement.

March 22 militants were not the only people who confronted general assemblies with the choice of joining or opposing actions. Individuals assumed the right to interrupt general assembly discussions in order to describe actions they were engaged in, to seek support, and to confront passive "sympathizers" and "revolutionary spectators" with the challenge: "What are you actually DOING to liberate yourself?"

This right to intervene, which was granted fairly universally, was frequently abused. All types and varieties of small actionettes were described at general assemblies, not merely actions which were significant and possible in terms of the changed situation and the social power of the people ready to act.

When there were no collective actions which were significant as transformations of the social situation, the general assemblies lost their character of self-organized activity, and frequently degenerated into audiences of spectators bored by the machinations of the bureaucrats up front. This degeneration was frequently explained as a structural shortcoming of the general assemblies; the action committees were supposedly more effective structures. However, the action committees were integral parts of the general assembly. The general assembly, a large body of people, did not itself perform actions: the actions were carried out by smaller groups of people who organized and planned the

projects which had been chosen and defined by the assembly. The action committees did not represent a new “social structure” which was to be the “form of future society.” The second function of the action committees was to make possible direct communication, development of ideas and perspectives, definition of concrete tasks, which would not have been possible among the larger body of people. However, when the action committees became “institutionalized,” when they no longer situated their activity within the context of the general assembly which gave rise to them, when committee members began to think of their committee as an institution, as a *thing* whose significance was explained in terms of a mysterious “revolutionary movement,” the activity of the committees lost its context. Consequently, the degeneration of the general assemblies was in fact merely a reflection of the degeneration of the action committees: it’s not because there were bureaucrats that action committee militants couldn’t say anything relevant to the general assembly, but precisely because the militants ceased having anything to say that there were bureaucrats.

The Citroën Action Committee was one of the groups that ceased to have any relevant actions to present to the general assembly at Censier. This committee, like the others, was not able to engage in action which was transparently liberatory for all the people gathered in the assembly. The Committee described “contacts” with foreign workers, attempts to create places for unhampered discussions inside the factories, attempts to encourage workers to take factory trucks to collect food which peasants were willing to distribute freely. However, the Citroën Committee people did not, for example, go to the factory saying, “We know where there’s food, and we need some of the trucks inside,” and they did not propose to the general assembly, “We’re going inside the factory to take the trucks, and we need fifty people to help us.”

Yet the Citroën Committee continued to exist, and to “function.” What did we actually do during the month after the outbreak of the strike, and what did we think we were doing? Did we engage in so much motion because we “liked the workers”?

Part of the reason we went to the factories was that we considered ourselves as simply so much physical force which could help the workers take over the factories. However, the initiative in this case was

left “to the workers,” and since the workers had not liberated themselves from the union bureaucracy, the initiative was left to the union bureaucrats. Consequently, as a “physical force,” the action committee militants went to the factory gates to help the CGT. The first leaflets of the Citroën Committee in fact confirm this: “Workers, we support your political and union rights... your demands... Long live political and union liberties.” These statements can only have one meaning in a situation where there is one dominant union: they could only mean Long Live the CGT, whatever the illusions of the people who wrote the leaflets. The logic behind these propositions went approximately as follows: “It’s not necessary to offend the workers by attacking their union, which they accept.” However, the same logic could have been extended to the proposition, “We should not offend the workers by attacking capitalist society, which they also accept.”

This was a reformist strategy without any real elements that went beyond reformism. This strategy was nothing more than support for a wildcat strike, and when the strike was taken over by the union, the committee militants supported a traditional, bureaucratic union strike.

## **Self-Organization in Action Committees**

What type of consciousness led action committee militants to this reformist strategy?

Characterized in very general terms, it is a consciousness which simply accepts the vast majority of the regularities and conventions of capitalist everyday life; a consciousness which accepts bureaucratic organization, private property, the representation of workers through unions, the separation of workers in terms of particular tasks and locations in society. In short, it is a consciousness which accepts capitalist society. It is within this framework that the militants “move around.” They “take actions,” but do not even apply outside of Censier what they are already doing inside of Censier. Self-organized in Censier, they still accept capitalist society. (A minor example of this is that “revolutionaries” who think they are struggling to abolish capitalist society once and for all, do not use last names because they fear the repression that will come once “stability” is restored.) They want to participate in whatever actions take place: they support workers striking for higher wages,

they support workers demanding more “rights” for union bureaucrats, they support people striking for an “autonomous national radio station,” even though this conflicts with other “ideas” they hold.

There were, of course, several types of action committees: some were as reformist as the Communist Party and the union; others tried to define a “revolutionary strategy” by passing through reformist “transitional steps.” Some action committee militants projected the self-organization of the universities to the factories, but they projected corporatist rather than social self-organization. This corporatist self-organization in the factories appealed to two types: it appealed to anti-communists and liberals, and it appealed to anarchist-communists. To the anti-communists, self-organization in each factory meant that workers would organize a separate union in each factory and get out of the CGT. The “radicals” made no clear attacks on this perspective, and it is precisely because of this that they had even less appeal for workers than the bureaucrats of the CGT. Workers are obviously much stronger with the CGT than they would be with separate unions in each factory. Members of the CGT were in fact sensible to reject a perspective which promised little more than fragmentation within capitalist society. The “autonomous” workers’ organizations would replace the national union in the task of selling the labor force, namely of bargaining with the capitalist or state owners, and they would obviously have less strength in doing this than a national union.

What, then, was the “action” of the action committees after the outbreak of the strike? They “kept something going.” They “continued the struggle.” Militants spent time and energy. Why? Was it simply that no one had anything to do, friends came to see friends, “intellectuals” came to “talk to workers”? The Citroën Committee, for example, continued to meet every day. Some days were spent discussing an article written by two members; another day a worker wrote a reformist leaflet; on another occasion there was a fight with fascists in front of the factory. People were certainly kept busy. But did they move in some direction? Did they have a strategy, perspectives?

Some of us did have perspectives. But we were unable to define actions which led from where we were to where we wanted to get. We called for a “general assembly of the workers,” for “defense of the facto-

ries by the workers.” But it was not our actions that were to lead to, or provoke, these events. There was an expectation (or a hope) that someone else, somewhere else, would bring these things about. If “someone” would do that, then there would be self-defense, escalation, and so on. Our “perspectives” were based on events that had not, in fact, taken place. Somehow “the workers” were to realize these perspectives themselves, even though the people who had the perspectives were not inside the factories. The action committee people did not go into the factory to call for the formation of a general assembly of all those present, the way they had done at Censier. They told the workers to do it. And there were no significant elements among the workers to do that. If one or another group of workers had formed such a general assembly, it would have meant that these workers were more “radical” than the Censier militants, who were unable to translate words into actions. But a factory-full of workers who were more “radical” than the people in Censier would obviously have provided the basis for large perspectives. If a group of workers had invited the population to use the technology freely, to take the cars and machines home, this action would clearly have led to various types of “escalation.” Such workers would also have confronted other workers’ sheepishness.

The militants who gathered at Censier expected action to come from a mythologically conceived “mass” which has its own perspectives and which acts. This dependence on external action can be situated at the very origin of the formation of the worker-student action committees at Censier. Already on May 6, young workers and intellectuals who fought together on the barricades began discussions. These groups of students and workers continued the discussions when they occupied Censier on May 11, in the general assemblies and in smaller groups. It was in these early assemblies that the “militants” at Censier confronted radical actions proposed by workers.

A large number of workers were among the occupants of Censier. Many of these workers understood that the continuity of capitalist daily life had been broken, a rupture had taken place, the regularities of life were suspended; consequently they understood that new activities were possible. Other workers saw the student demonstrations and street fights as an occasion for raising new material demands. However, the

“intellectuals” at Censier tended to amalgamate all workers into the same “class”; they failed to distinguish those who were there to reform capitalist life from those who intended to abolish capitalism, and as a result they were unable to focus on the specific character of the actions proposed by the radical workers.

For example, young workers from a private printing school announced that they had thrown out their director, were about to occupy the school, and wanted to put the presses at the disposal of the people gathered at Censier. However, Censier “militants” were not as radical as these workers; “illegally” occupying a university building, they questioned the “legality” of the action proposed by the young workers (who might have done better to propose this action to members of the March 22 Movement). Another example: two or three workers came from the newspaper distribution enterprise of Paris. They called on Censier militants to join them in stopping the distribution of newspapers; they called on the people gathered at Censier to explain to workers at their enterprise what was taking place in the universities.

The militants who listened to these suggestions did not react as if they themselves were active agents who could transform a social situation in a real factory by going there in person. (One of the writers of this article was present at a discussion which took place before May 10 between a militant of the March 22 Movement (Dany Cohn-Bendit) and some of the people who later influenced the development of occupied Censier. It was clear that the future Censier occupants did not define themselves the same way Dany defined himself; Dany regarded his own activity as a dynamic force which could transform the social situation; but they asked about the “support” Dany had, about the “masses behind” him. Their conception was that, somehow, the “masses” were going to rise and act, and that the militants would be able to define their roles only within the context of this active “mass.” These militants regarded themselves as helpless to transform a concrete set of activities.)

Consequently, when the worker-student action committees were founded in Censier, the people at the origin of these committees already defined for themselves a different role from that which had been played by the March 22 Movement and which had been expressed by Dany

Cohn-Bendit. The Censier militants formed action committees instead of joining radical workers in transforming social life. It is ironic that the militants constituted “action committees” precisely at the moment when they renounced action. They did have some conception of “action.” It is not the same action as that of the March 22 Movement – a particular group of people who themselves transform a concrete social activity. It is action which consists of following the “spontaneous” activity of a social group, particularly “the working class.” The aim is “To Serve The People.” For example, if workers would occupy a factory and open its doors to the militants, then they would go to help; then there would be no question of “legality.”

This lack of direct action by the militants is justified ideologically in the Censier general assemblies through the construction of a mythology about “revolutionary actions” performed by “the workers themselves.” Since the militants do not themselves act, but follow the actions of “the people,” the myth assures them that “the people” are able to act “spontaneously.” The city of Nantes becomes mythologized as a “workers’ commune” where workers supposedly rule all the activities of their daily lives, whereas what had happened in Nantes was that a new bureaucracy had temporarily gained power over the distribution network. The same kind of mythology is developed around the supposed “revolutionary activities” of the workers in the Rhône-Poulenc chemical plant. It is said that the workers had thrown out the union bureaucrats and had organized themselves into rank and file committees which ruled the entire factory; here, supposedly, is a perspective of self-organization initiated by workers inside their own factory. The fact is that the union bureaucracy in that factory had created the “rank and file committees” in an attempt to recuperate the agitation taking place among the workers, and furthermore, through its control of a “central strike committee,” the union bureaucracy maintained its power in that factory from the beginning to the end of the strike. Some of the workers in the chemical plant saw a potentiality for transforming the rank and file committees into real sources of power of the workers; these workers went to Censier to try to convince others of the urgency of transforming these committees; they defined themselves as militants with the power to change their situation. However, on the



basis of what these workers said, the Censier militants did not define concrete actions through which they would transform the rank and file committees; instead, they transformed the statements of these workers into confirmations of the myths about the “spontaneous revolutionary activity of the working class.”

On the basis of this mythology, the Censier militants moved yet further away from direct action. The further they got from action carried out by themselves, the more radical became their perspectives for the action of others. They developed conceptions of “self-management by the workers themselves” and conceptions of “active strike” (striking workers were to begin production on their own). In other words, the Censier militants constructed an ideology. They put this ideology into leaflets which were distributed to workers. However, it is ironic that the Censier leaflets spoke of “active strike,” of an economy run by the workers themselves, after the union bureaucracy had already gained control of the strike throughout all France. This action no longer took place in reality; it took place in discussions and debates among action committee militants at Censier.

## Critique of Actions

If the consciousness of the action committee militants did not go beyond the limits of a capitalist and bureaucratic perspective, why were so many “revolutionary militants” attracted to Censier for more than a month after the strike had been taken over by the union? What was the nature of the “actions” of these committees?

The variety of outlooks and political positions gathered together in the Censier committees cannot be characterized as reformist *per se*. They did not come to Censier in order to take part in reformist actions; in terms of what they said, in committee meetings and general assemblies, they made it clear that they thought they were engaging in revolutionary actions, actions which were leading to the abolition of capitalism and bureaucracy. Yet in front of the factories they supported “the workers’ demands,” they supported “political and union rights,” and they called for “autonomous workers’ organizations.”

In a brief characterization, it may be said that their actions were not reformist *per se*; they were opportunist *per se*. The Censier worker-

student committees were at the front lines of the possibilities which the social situation permitted, and there they did whatever the situation permitted. When capitalist society functioned regularly, they did everything which is normally done in capitalist society, accepting all of the limitations of normal capitalist life: wage-strikes, unions. However, in May the opportunity existed for members of the population to engage in the production process, to appropriate the social means of production. And in May they were ready to do this. Opportunism. In this sense, one can say that the people who “agitated” from Censier represent a genuine popular movement which was ready to do whatever the situation allowed. Subjectively they thought they were revolutionaries because they thought a revolution was taking place; they thought the factories were going to be occupied and “socialized,” and they thought they would be among the first to go inside the factories and join the workers in a new system of production. They were not going to initiate this process; they were going to follow the wave wherever it pushed them.

However, when they got to the factory gates on the day of the occupation, they confronted a “slightly different” situation. The workers were not calling for the population to enter the factory. Union bureaucrats were calling for the “occupation” of the factory. And so the militants shifted with the wind: the bureaucrats were calling for a wage strike, so the “revolutionaries” supported the workers’ “legitimate demands.”

Of course it was “revolutionary,” in May, for a group of people to be ready to “socialize” the factories as soon as the situation permitted. But “someone else” was to bring this about; these “militants” were ready to step in after it was done.

If these generalizations characterize the dominant activities of the Censier worker-student action committees, then these committees were not “revolutionary” and their members were not “militants.” They represented a section of the population who were ready for the revolutionary change when they thought they were about to be pushed into this change. They were ready to make the choice, but they were not the ones who would initiate the actions which created the situation that forced the choice. In this sense, they had no direction of their own.

They went precisely to the places where change was possible, and they were ready to take part, if someone brought it about. Who would bring it about? There was March 22; there were “the workers”; even the Gaullist police were expected to “trip off” a revolution by mistake. But these people were only ready to step into conditions created for them.

It must be pointed out that the people at Censier were not “opportunists” in the sense that they were ready to accept any possibilities. They did have a distinctly anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic perspective. This is why they rejected the “leadership” of the bureaucratic mini-groups. It must also be pointed out that there were numerous “political” militants at Censier who were not disposed to turn wherever the wind blew them, and who had relatively clear conceptions about the bureaucratic and capitalist consciousness prevalent among workers, about “workers’ councils” and “self-management” as wedges which could be used to undermine this total acceptance of capitalist structures.

However, it must still be asked why the Censier militants did not succeed in pushing the situation a step further. In other words, why did the strike become a traditional bureaucratic strike; why did it fall under the control of union functionaries? The strike could not have been controlled by the CGT if large numbers of people had rejected this bureaucracy’s right to represent anyone. The CGT bureaucrats had power within the factories because the workers accepted this power. The bureaucrats are not popular because of the attractiveness of their personalities, they have very little repressive power, and when the wildcat strike broke out, their power had in fact been undermined.

The “take-over” by the CGT already began a day after the factory occupations began, at the Renault plant. About ten thousand people march from the center of Paris; they are ready for a feast with the workers inside the nationalized auto plant. The demonstrators get to the factory, and find the gates shut. Whoever is at the head of this march accepts the closed gates as the last word. But the gates represent nothing; cheering workers stand on the roof; they can send ropes down. And in some parts, the fence of the factory is low enough to climb. Yet suddenly people fear a “power” they had never feared before: the CGT bureaucrats.

If ten thousand people had wanted to get in, the bureaucrats would have had no power. But there were clearly very few “revolutionaries” in the march or inside the factory; there were very few people who felt that whatever was inside that plant was *theirs*. There were some people who wanted to “storm the gates” in order to be hit on the head by the CGT cops at the gates. But there was apparently no one inside or outside the factory who regarded it as social property. One who knows it’s social property doesn’t accept a bureaucrat blocking the door.

People in that march had varied pretexts for doing nothing. “Such action is premature; it’s adventuristic! the plant isn’t social property yet.” Of course the CGT bureaucrats agreed with this reasoning, a reasoning which completely undermines any “right” the workers might have to strike. And ten thousand militants, most of whom had just gone out of occupied universities to take part in the march, most of whom had actively challenged the legitimacy of the power of the police in the street, blandly accepted the authority of the union toughs who guarded the factory gates.

What attracted people to Censier was the impression that here actions were being prepared which would go beyond the situation which had greeted the demonstrators at the gates of Renault. The Censier general assemblies, as well as the action committee meetings, between May 17 and May 20, gave the impression that here were gathered people determined to go further. Here were “the others” who were going to push the situation beyond its newly reached bureaucratic limits.

A lot of people went to Censier to take part in actions on a completely blind basis. Lots of people who lived completely empty lives found a brief opportunity to give out leaflets; for such people giving out leaflets was, in itself, more meaningful than the normal activities of their daily lives.

But there were also people committed to going beyond leaflet distribution for its own sake, and the possibility of going beyond seemed to exist at Censier. Extremely significant “actions” were discussed at the Censier general assemblies. One got the impression that people had a perspective, a direction.

However, this “perspective,” this “direction,” turned out to be nothing more than an eloquent speech which countered the position of a Maoist or a Trotskyist. The eloquence masked the fact that the speaker did not feel that social property was his in reality; it was only his philosophically, and he “socialized it” philosophically. The “socialization of the means of production” was not conceived as a practical activity, but as an ideological position opposed to the ideological position of “nationalization,” just as “self-organization by the workers” was a concept opposed to the concept of “a revolutionary party.” The eloquent speeches were not accompanied by eloquent actions, because the speaker did not regard himself as deprived; it was “the workers” who were deprived, and consequently “only the workers” could act. The speaker called on workers to have a conviction which the speaker didn’t have; he called on workers to translate words into actions, but his own “action” consisted only of words.

### **Partial Liberation of the Militants**

How can we explain this passivity, during a period of crisis, among militants who consider themselves revolutionary activists in normal times? Why did they suddenly depend on the action of others?

The actions of the Nanterre students begin as a struggle for total liberation. To what extent did the actions of the Censier committees have this character?

In the first Censier assemblies, and in the street fights, something appeared which broke with the constraints, the obstacles of daily life in capitalist society. As soon as students built barricades, occupied public buildings, recognized no authority within those buildings, they communicated the liberating character of the movement: nothing is sacred, neither habits nor authorities. The regularities of yesterday are rejected today. And it is the regularities of yesterday that make my life regular today: constrained, well-defined and dead. The liberation comes precisely from my independence of convention: I’m born in a certain age which has certain instruments of production and certain kinds of knowledge; I have the possibility to combine my ability with my knowledge, and can use the socially available means of production as instruments with which to realize an individual or collective project. In

carrying out an activity, I no longer recognize the constraints of capitalist daily life: I no longer recognize the right of policemen to decide what can and cannot be done with means of production that have been socially created; I no longer recognize the legitimacy of a state or academic bureaucracy which forces me into a system of learning to train me for something which is not my project and to which I'll be bound for the rest of my life.

By pursuing the constrained daily life of capitalist society, the individual performs certain activities because of convention, because he defines himself as someone who has no choice. My activities depend on external circumstances. I do certain things because they are the ones that are permitted. I do not act in terms of my possibilities, but in terms of external constraints.

Social change takes place within capitalist society, but it is not perceived by me as a project which I bring about together with others. The change is external to me; it is a spectacle; it results from huge impersonal forces: a nation, a state, a revolutionary movement... These forces are all external to me, they are not the outcome of my own daily activity. They are the actors on the stage, the players in a game, and I simply watch. I may take sides and cheer for one side or the other, for the villain or the hero. But I'm not in it.

In Censier, in the general assemblies during the early days of the occupation, activity had the character of a project: the external spectacle had been destroyed, and so had the dependence (since the dependence is nothing but the characteristic role of the member of an audience who watches the spectacle). Most people originally went to Censier as spectators, they went to see what "the revolutionaries" were going to do next, they went to a show. But by attending one after another assembly where people discussed what to do about the building, about Paris, about the world, they were confronted with the awareness that they were not observing a separate group, a group of actors on the stage. One quickly realized that it's the person sitting next to him, in front or behind him, who defined what was to be done in Censier, and what has to be done outside Censier. These assemblies did not have the character of external spectacles, but of personal projects which one carries out

with people one knows: the subjects were activities which would affect all those who made decisions about them.

The passive, cheering attitude of the TV-watcher which existed at the first assemblies is transformed into an active attitude. Instead of passively observing what THEY (an external, separate force) are going to do, for example about the cooking in Censier, YOU speak up because you prefer clean to dirty food and because you have the power to change the situation of the kitchen. Once you participate actively, once action is no longer the specialty of a separate group, you suddenly realize that you have power over larger projects than the Censier kitchen: the “institutions” of society lose their character of external spectacles and come into focus as social projects which can be determined by you together with others.

This description is exaggerated; it’s an attempt to characterize an attitude. In actuality, such attitudes expressed themselves as tendencies. For example, when some of the bureaucrats of the future appointed themselves to a “service of order” or to a “strike committee” which was to rule Censier under the guise of coordinating its activities, people did not simply watch them “take over,” whispering to each other about the villainy of the act. People were angry: they took the necessary steps to prevent the installation of any self-appointed “coordinating committee.” They knew that a “central committee” would once again make decisions and undertake actions instead of the occupants, and the newly liberated occupants refused to give up their power, their possibility to act, to decide. When a “service of order” planted itself at the entrance to a general assembly and claimed that “foreigners” could not participate in that assembly, the “service of order” was quickly removed by people inside the assembly.

However, the sense that every individual in the building ran the building, the feeling that if there was something he didn’t like he had to act, together with others, to change it – this sense of an individual’s social power, this liberation of the individual, was not extended outside Censier. As soon as people left Censier they were once again helpless; some separate group (March 22 Movement, The Working Class) once again became the actor in what was once again a spectacle. The militants were not, in fact, liberated; they did not in fact act as if the society

was theirs; they did not act as if society consisted of people with whom to carry out projects, limited only by the available instruments and the available knowledge. Even inside of Censier, a retrogression took place: a division of labor installed itself; special groups did the mimeographing, the cooking, the leaflet distribution.

There were even people in Censier to whom nothing at all was communicated. A group of Americans set up an “action committee of the American Left.” This was an example of complete passivity on the part of an entire “action committee.” Many of them were draft resisters who had made a decision once, and had “retired” immediately after making it. They went to the Paris demonstrations, to the barricades, to Censier – not as active participants changing their world, but as spectators, as observers watching the activity of others. The events were totally external to them; the events had no link with their own lives; they did not sense the world as their world. Consequently what they saw was a different kind of people, the French, struggling against a different type of society, French Gaullist society. They were “on the side” of the revolutionaries, the same way one is “on the side” of a particular team in a game. This group was the symbol of an attitude which characterized many others who came to Censier, attended assemblies and committee meetings, and watched, and waited – like dead things. They absorbed a new commodity, a new spectacle, which was exciting and stimulating because of its newness. Such attitudes were a dead weight on whatever personal liberation did take place at Censier. These symbols of deadness demobilized others, they made it harder for others to realize they had a power which these people didn’t dream of taking.

Some people reached the point of asking someone “what can I do?” and thus already took a step toward living. But when no one gave them “a good answer,” they lapsed back into passivity.

The passivity which characterized the “American Left” at Censier also characterized the main “actions” of the most “active” committees of Censier, such as the Citroën Committee. When the strike broke out we went to the Citroën factory expecting some kind of fraternization, perhaps dancing in the streets. But what we found was a situation which looked like cowboys herding stubborn cows, namely the CGT bureaucrats trying to herd workers into the factory, with no contact or



communication between the bureaucrats and the “masses.” The workers had no conception of what was happening to them; they merely stood, waited, and watched the bureaucrats shouting through megaphones.

Everyone watched and no one lived. A bureaucrat shouted a speech, his delegates baaa’d loudly, these cheerleaders called for “enthusiasm” from the spectators, the indifferent “mass.” “Masses” is what people become in capitalist society; they visibly transform themselves into herds of animals waiting to be pushed around. Things pass in front of the eyes of the “mass,” but the “mass” doesn’t move, it doesn’t live; things happen to it. This time the bureaucrats were trying to cheer them into pushing themselves inside the factory gates, because the Central Committee had called for a “general strike with factory occupations.”

This is the situation when two groups arrive at the factory gate: the Worker-Student Action Committee from Censier, and a Marxist-Leninist group with a large banner, a group called “To Serve the People” (*Servir le Peuple*). The militants of the Citroën Committee from Censier distribute a leaflet supporting the workers’ “demands,” while the other group “Serve the People” by placing themselves next to the factory gate in a “strike picket” which serves no function whatever. Gradually the militants of both groups become passive, stand aside, and wait for the “autonomous action of the workers;” they look at the workers (mainly foreign) on the other side of the street. It suddenly becomes a spectacle where everyone is watching and each is waiting for all the others to act. And nothing dramatic happens; the sheep slowly get herded into the stable.

And the Citroën Committee militants? Well, we helped the bureaucrats herd the sheep in. Why? We said, “the workers still accept the power of the CGT” and our response to that was to accept the power of the CGT. None of us took the microphone to inform the workers who we were, to tell them what we intended to do. Suddenly we were completely helpless, we were victims of “external forces” that moved outside us. People who are used to submitting continued submitting.

The reason we were there was some kind of realization that personal liberation had to pass through the social liberation of all the means of production. There was also a knowledge that the workers, by alienating

their labor, produce Capital as well as the capitalist means of repression. Yet when we went to the factory for these reasons, and didn't fight, what we had done in the street and in Censier had something of a partial character, because through our action at the factory we accepted the repression and we accepted property. Did we realize it was a question of socializing the means of production then or never, that this was the situation we had wanted to create for years as militants? Suddenly the situation was there, and we were at the crucial place; yet we felt no anger either at the pushing cowboys or at the cows still allowing themselves to be pushed. This lack of anger reflects passivity. We hadn't really liberated ourselves; we didn't grasp the means of production as ours, as instruments for our development which were being blocked by the bureaucrats and by the workers.

We fought the police at one end, and at the other end we told ourselves that the self-appointed union guards were to control the instruments with which means of repression are produced. We caught the spirit of liberation at the barricades, yet by the time we got to the places where repression originates, namely at the places of production, we had lost our anger, we stopped fighting the repression. We accepted. Yet by accepting, we did exactly the same thing as the workers who were herded into factories by the CGT, and who also accepted, stood, watched, and waited.

One of the favorite arguments of "anarchists" and "libertarians" at Censier was: "The workers must make their own decisions; we cannot substitute ourselves for them." This is a blind application of an anti-bureaucratic tactic to a situation where this tactic had no application at all. It meant that action committee militants had no more of a right to tell workers what to do than a bureaucratic mini-party had. But the situation where this tactic was applied was not the one at which it was aimed. The action committee militants were sections of the population who had achieved some level of self-organization. They were not in front of the factory carrying out a strategy which would lead them to "state power." They may have had no strategy at all; in any case, the action was an action of self-liberation, in the sense of eliminating those conditions of daily life which kept them from living. This self-liberation could only have been carried through if they eliminated the obstacles to

their self expression. The obstacles to their liberation were in the factories, as means of production which were “alien” to them, which “belonged” to a separate group.

By telling themselves that it was “up to the workers” to take the factories, a “substitution” did in fact take place, but it was the opposite “substitution” from the one the anarchists feared. The militants substituted the inaction (or rather the bureaucratic action) of the workers’ bureaucracies, which was the only “action” the workers were willing to take, for their own action. The anarchist argument, in fact, turned the situation upside down. The militants thus went in front of the factories and allowed the bureaucrats to act instead of them; they substituted the bureaucracy’s action for their own. Later they apologized for their own inaction by talking about the “betrayal” of the CGT. But the CGT was not “to blame” for anything. When the “militants” went to the factory gates and watched, they did no more than the workers who stood and watched. And when the workers watched, they allowed the CGT to act for them. The “militants” rationalised their dependence, their inaction, by saying that the CGT “took over.” But the relation is mutual. The militants, together with the workers, created the power of the union bureaucracy. The militants did not go to the factory to liberate themselves; they waited for an inexistent power to liberate them.

Once the strike was under the control of the union bureaucracy, other habits of capitalist daily life returned among the militants. Perhaps the most significant “relapse” was the acceptance of division and separation among different social groups. Even though the committees were composed of workers as well as “intellectuals,” and even though committee members ceased to separate each other into these two categories, they developed a “specialist” attitude which separated committee militants from both workers as well as “intellectuals.” At the factory they separated themselves from the workers. And in the university they began to separate themselves from “students.” The militants developed the attitude that “We are engaged in the most important process because we’re going to the factories.” There was a self-righteousness about this attitude which was unjustified, since no coherent analysis of the actual importance of the actions was ever made. Contrasted to this lack of self-analysis was a contemptuous atti-

tude towards all committees engaged in “student problems.” Perhaps some of the contempt was justified, but the point is that the worker-student committee militants felt no obligation to even find out what the “student” committees were doing. It was automatically assumed that going to the doors of the factories to watch the sheep-like behavior of workers in the face of bureaucrats was, *prima facie*, more important than anything else that was being done anywhere.

This acceptance of social separation was a relapse in the sense that the people who originally gathered in Censier had begun to break such lines down. Between May 17 and May 20, at the outbreak of the strike, people abandoned their varied separate activities, like literature, specialized jobs. They came to Censier to synthesize their activities in a collective project. For a period of about two or three days, the worker-student committees of Censier were thought to be the point of synthesis of the entire movement. There was a vague feeling that the people who had gathered there were determined to liberate all the means of production for the free development of everyone. It was this feeling that accounted for the sudden excitement around Censier: its general assemblies grew immense, people came from all over Paris to “join” action committees, to ask what they could do in their own neighborhoods. People wanted to be part of this process of liberation. This only lasted for about two days.

This spirit of synthesis, this attempt to integrate one’s fragmentary existence into a significant whole, came to an end as soon as the spectacle reaffirmed itself at the gates of the factories. Inside the Citroën Committee, for example, the attempt to synthesize one’s life, to make a whole out of a fragment, was suddenly dead. Only a vague perception that “something unusual” had been felt the day the strikes began remained with the militants. And this vague perception had some extremely ironic consequences. The first day the militants went to the factories was felt to be so significant, it carried so much psychological importance in the minds of the militants, that they tried, for a month afterward, to recapture the ‘spirit’ of that day. And the actual result was a ritualistic repetition of going to the factories day after day – and through this repetition, specialization and separation returned. They became specialists in the kind of thing they had done on the first day of

the strike. They traveled to the factories, they distributed leaflets, they spoke to workers. But there was a tragic difference between these later excursions and the first visit to the factory. On the day of the strike, they had gone to be part of the entire social process, they had wanted to learn everything. But when they became specialists in “worker-student actions,” they lost interest in everything else. They now considered themselves different from the commissions engaged in exposing and analyzing capitalist ideology, from artists undermining the basis for a specialized art. A vulgar kind of “workerism” set in; watching the workers in front of the factory was a more important “action” than exposing capitalist ideology or rejecting a separatist architecture. The will to engage in the entire social process disappeared; what took its place was the same kind of specialization, the same kind of ritual repetition, which characterizes daily life in capitalist society.

The passivity of the militants in front of the factory and the sheep-like behavior of the workers who let themselves be herded around by bureaucrats – this is the situation which mini-bureaucrats interpret as a confirmation of everything they’ve always known; this is the situation that “confirms the absolute necessity of a Revolutionary Party.” As they see it, the “spontaneous action of the masses” (the action committee people, for example) cannot take over the factories, and the “spontaneous action of the workers” can only lead to liberal reformism. Consequently, the “only solution” is for the workers to shift their allegiance from the “reformists” to the “revolutionaries” (the mini-bureaucracies); the workers must “recognize” the mini-bureaucracy as “the revolutionary vanguard which will lead them to a different kind of life.” “Being recognized” by the workers as their “vanguard” means getting the passive support of the workers; this support will make it possible for the mini-bureaucrats to place themselves into all the positions of power in society. This support will make it possible for the Party to “take state power,” namely to head every bureaucratic hierarchy and to dispense repression. In order to “take state power,” the “revolutionary Party” must convince the workers that the Party “represents the workers’ true interests” and, once in power, will satisfy all of the workers’ demands. Defining themselves as the only ones able to realize “socialism,” the mini-bureaucrats promise a future in which the activities people engage

in will not be projects, but external spectacles carried out by separate groups – in other words, a future daily life which is identical to daily life in capitalist society, with the “major difference” that the former mini-bureaucrats become transformed into “the government.” Furthermore, the condition for their coming to power is precisely the maintenance of this passivity. It’s precisely the sheep-like behavior of the workers that permits the mini-bureaucrats to assume the power which had previously been assumed by capitalists, state functionaries, union bureaucrats. The separate power of a separate social group continues to rule over people’s activities, only now the ruling group calls itself “revolutionary” and may even call its directorates “workers’ councils.”

The justification for this behavior on the part of the mini-bureaucrats is the supposed “lack of consciousness” among the workers. However, what these “revolutionaries” call consciousness is the theory which will justify this particular group’s assumption of state power. What they call consciousness is the theory which rationalizes the separate power of this particular group. “Consciousness” is what enables the bureaucracy to hold power over society as a separate group while defining itself as “the mass of the workers;” it is the theory which makes it possible for this bureaucracy to imagine that its particular rule is the rule of all. The same passivity, the same spectacle, the same alienation of labor persists, only now the factory director is a party functionary, the foremen are all members of a “workers’ council,” and the new language which describes this situation is a set of euphemisms which in themselves represent a new stage of linguistic development.

This bureaucratic conception of “power” and “consciousness” is not a rejection of the constraints of capitalist daily life. The bureaucratic “Revolutionary Party” which defines its action within a sea of passivity struggles to become the central constraint of daily life.

However, inactivity and spontaneism, an attitude which holds that “we can’t substitute ourselves for the workers,” is not the opposite of the bureaucratic conception, since such inactivity represents an abdication to the constraints and conventions of capitalist daily life. The point is to break down the indifference, the dependence, the passivity which characterize daily life in capitalist society. The point is not a new illegitimate appropriation of the social means of production by a new separate

group, nor a new illegitimate usurpation of social power by new “leaders,” but the appropriation of the social means of production by the living members of society, and the destruction of separate power. Consequently, revolutionaries whose aim is to liberate daily life betray their project when they abdicate to passivity or impose themselves over it: the point is to wake the dead, to force the passive to choose between a conscious acceptance of constraint or a conscious affirmation of life.

## **The Partial Character of the Revolutionary Theory**

What happened in May? Was it a spontaneous and incoherent uprising of various sections of the population, or a coherent step on the part of a determined revolutionary movement? Was it a blind eruption of accumulated complaints and dissatisfactions, or a conscious attempt to overthrow a social order? Did the student movement which set off the explosion have a coherent revolutionary theory, and a strategy based on the theory? If it had a theory, to what extent was it communicated to the action committees, to the workers?

There were unquestionably elements of revolutionary theory at the origin of the movement. This is illustrated by the fact that students in Nanterre began a struggle against the American war in Vietnam and were able to relate the activities of their own university to this war. This does not mean that the “majority” of the fighting students explicitly grasped the connection between their own daily lives and the war in Vietnam. Most students undoubtedly grasped the war as a distant struggle between David and Goliath, they grasped it as a spectacle in which they had sympathy for one side. But a small number of students acted on a much more profound understanding the moment they engaged themselves in a struggle to unveil the connection between the university, the capitalist system, and the war in Vietnam. To these students the war in Vietnam ceased to be an “issue” and became an integral part of their own daily lives.

A background in Marxist theory undoubtedly plays a large role in giving European students some tools with which to grasp the connection between their studies and the war. However, in addition to this background in critical theory, through the mass media European

students are given a daily view of the grossest spectacle in the modern world: the United States.

Increasingly sophisticated means of communication reveal to spectators all over the world a spectacle of two hundred million people who passively observe "their own boys" killing, torturing, maiming human beings daily, a spectacle of torture which is "scientifically" prepared by teams of the most highly trained "scientists" in the world, a spectacle of an immense "educational system" devoted to a frantic research for methods of controlling, manipulating, maiming and killing human beings.

The arrogant insistence with which the "American way of life" advertises itself puts the European student on guard against the methods through which "Americans" are produced. The Nanterre student is able to see himself being transformed into an indifferent servant of a military machine. Students become aware that the activities for which they are being trained are intimately related to the Vietnam war. They begin to grasp connections between the bureaucratic content of their "education," the activities performed by the bureaucrats, and the killing of Vietnamese. And when students begin to engage in "exposures" of their professors and classes, they try to make explicit, transparent, the connection between the "objectivity" of this or that "social science," and the activity which is a consequence of the practice of this "objective knowledge"; they begin to unveil what this system of knowledge does.

Students who begin to struggle against the war in Vietnam by exposing the content of lectures at the University of Nanterre show that they have two crucial insights: they perceive that their own activities at Nanterre are a part of an inter-connected system of activities which encompass the entire world society; and they perceive that their own practical activities at Nanterre have repercussions on the entire world society.

Even without a background in Marxist theory, students can see themselves manipulated daily by bureaucrats whose personal achievements and quality of life are not overly impressive: professors, university administrators, state functionaries. The students see themselves being used for purposes defined by the bureaucrats; they see themselves being trained to perform activities which others consider necessary.



They also perceive, though more vaguely, that the activities for which they're being prepared are related to the spectacle they watch on TV and in the press. These perceptions become "a theory" when the connections between the activities of the students, the professors, the bureaucrats, are made explicit. Revolutionary theory brings to light the connections between the students' own daily activities and the society of obedient TV-watching robots. The "revolutionary" mini-groups obviously contribute to this elucidation of daily life, since each group's "treasure" is one or another of Marx's numerous insights into the links between the daily activities of people under capitalism.

This exposure of the connections between the separate activities of capitalist daily life, this "research through action" which was undertaken by students at Nanterre, was only partially communicated to other sectors of the population, if at all. As soon as students perceived the connection between their passivity in the classroom and the brainwashing that took place in the university, they also perceived the action they had to undertake to put an end to the brainwashing: they had a strategy, and it consisted of breaking down the passivity of students.

When the Nanterre militants began to expose the activities they were being trained to perform, they developed only half a strategy for their own liberation. When they questioned the legitimacy of state and academic bureaucrats to define the content and direction of their lives, they developed only those tactics which would take power away from the academic bureaucrats. They know that stopping the academic bureaucracy is not enough: they know they have to stop activities in the rest of society. However, their strategy ends where it begins: with the university. Through a disruption of classes, through exposures of professors and occupations of auditoriums, they are able to stop the activities of the capitalist university. They know that their own choices are limited because of the activities of workers; they know that their own liberation means that they take what previous generations built, and they use these instruments to define the content and direction of their lives with other living individuals in collective projects.

They know that the power of the bureaucrats depends on the students' acceptance of this power. They also know that the power of the state, of capitalists and of union bureaucrats depends on workers'

acceptance of this power. But the workers' acceptance also has to be explained, since that partly depends on the indifference of the rest of the population. Thus the workers regard it as a normal part of life to sell their labor, to alienate their creative activity, and the rest of the population accepts this.

In the university, students begin to put the separate power of the bureaucrats to an end. But when they go to the factories, they are unable to define the steps which are necessary to break the dependence and helplessness of the workers. This reflects a lack of theory. They go to the workers as if the workers did in fact represent a separate group which must define its own separate strategy of liberation. Furthermore, although the student militants are able to connect their own powerlessness with the sheepishness of the workers who indifferently produce the instruments of their own repression, they make this connection only in concepts and are unable to translate it to reality; they are unable to define a strategy which is related to this perception. In the university they are conscious of themselves as living agents, they are conscious of their own power to transform their daily lives. They are able to set themselves a collective objective, and are able to move towards it. But they are unable to extend this power beyond the university. Once outside, they are suddenly helpless spectators who expect something to rise out of the "working class"; they cease to define themselves as members of society who have the power to transform it. They suddenly accept the legitimacy of the power of separate groups over the social instruments for their own liberation.

## **Birth of a Revolutionary Movement in Yugoslavia**

This text was written in May 1969 in Crikvenica, an island on the Adriatic coast. It was compiled from verbal and written information gathered by Perlman in Belgrade. For the second printing by *Black & Red*, in 1973, the title was changed to *Revolt in Socialist Yugoslavia*.

“Heretics are always more dangerous than enemies,” concluded a Yugoslav philosopher after analyzing the repression of Marxist intellectuals by the Marxist regime of Poland. (S. Stojanovic, in *Student*, Belgrade, April 9, 1968, p. 7.)

In Yugoslavia, where “workers’ self-management” has become the official ideology, a new struggle for popular control has exposed the gap between the official ideology and the social relations which it claims to describe. The heretics who exposed this gap have been temporarily isolated; their struggle has been momentarily suppressed. The ideology of “self-management” continues to serve as a mask for a commercial-technocratic bureaucracy which has successfully concentrated the wealth and power created by the Yugoslav working population. However, even a single and partial removal of the mask spoils its efficacy: the ruling “elite” of Yugoslavia has been exposed; its “Marxist” proclamations have been unveiled as myths which, once unveiled, no longer serve to justify its rule.

In June 1968, the gap between theory and practice, between official proclamations and social relations, was exposed through practice, through social activity: students began to organize themselves in demonstrations and general assemblies, and the regime which proclaims self-management reacted to this rare example of popular

self-organization by putting an end to it through police and press repression.

The nature of the gap between Yugoslav ideology and society had been analyzed before June 1968, not by “class enemies” of Yugoslavia’s ruling “revolutionary Marxists,” but by Yugoslav revolutionary Marxists – by heretics. According to official declarations, in a society where the working class is already in power there are no strikes, because it is absurd for workers to strike against themselves. Yet strikes, which were not reported by the press because they could not take place in Yugoslavia, have been breaking out for the past eleven years – and massively (*Susret*, No. 98, April 18, 1969). Furthermore, “strikes in Yugoslavia represent a symptom of the attempt to revive the workers’ movement.” In other words, in a society where workers are said to rule, the workers’ movement is dead. “This may sound paradoxical to some people. But it is no paradox due to the fact that workers’ self-management exists largely ‘on paper’...” (L. Tadic in *Student*, April 9, 1968, p. 7.)

Against whom do students demonstrate, against whom do workers strike, in a society where students and workers already govern themselves? The answer to this question cannot be found in declarations of the Yugoslav League of Communists, but only in critical analyses of Yugoslav social relations – analyses which are heretical because they contradict the official declarations. In capitalist societies, activities are justified in the name of progress and the national interest. In Yugoslav society, programs, policies and reforms are justified in the name of progress and the working class. However, it is not the workers who initiate the dominant projects, nor do the projects serve the workers’ interests:

“On the one hand, sections of the working class are wage-workers who live below the level necessary for existence. The burden of the economic reform is carried by the working class, a fact which must be openly admitted. On the other hand, small groups unscrupulously capitalize themselves overnight, on the basis of private labor, services, commerce, and as middlemen. Their capital is not based on their labor, but on speculation, mediation, transformation of personal labor into

property relations, and often on outright corruption.” (M. Pecujlic in *Student*, April 30, 1968, p. 2.)

The paradox can be stated in more general terms: social relations already known to Marx reappear in a society which has experienced a socialist revolution led by a Marxist party in the name of the working class. Workers receive wages in exchange for their sold labor (even if the wages are called “personal incomes” and “bonuses”); the wages are an equivalent for the material goods necessary for the workers’ physical and social survival; the surplus labor, appropriated by state or enterprise bureaucracies and transformed into capital, returns as an alien force which determines the material and social conditions of the workers’ existence. According to official histories, Yugoslavia eliminated exploitation in 1945, when the Yugoslav League of Communists won state power. Yet workers whose surplus labor supports a state or commercial bureaucracy, whose unpaid labor turns against them as a force which does not seem to result from their own activity but from some higher power – such workers perform forced labor: they are exploited. According to official histories, Yugoslavia eliminated the bureaucracy as a social group over the working class in 1952, when the system of workers’ self-management was introduced. But workers who alienate their living activity in exchange for the means of life do not control themselves; they are controlled by those to whom they alienate their labor and its products, even if these people eliminated themselves in legal documents and proclamations.

In the United States, trusts ceased to exist legally precisely at the point in history when trusts began to centralize the enormous productive power of the U. S. working class. In Yugoslavia, the social stratum which manages the working class ceased to exist in 1952. But in actual fact, “the dismantling of the unified centralized bureaucratic monopoly led to a net of self-managing institutions in all branches of social activity (nets of workers’ councils, self-managing bodies, etc.) From a formal-legal, normative, institutional point of view, the society is self-managed. But is this also the status of real relations? Behind the self-managed facade, within the self-managed bodies, two powerful and opposed tendencies arise from the production relations. Inside of each center of decision there is a bureaucracy in a metamorphosed, decen-

tralized form. It consists of informal groups who maintain a monopoly in the management of labor, a monopoly in the distribution of surplus labor against the workers and their interests, who appropriate on the basis of their position in the bureaucratic hierarchy and not on the basis of labor, who try to keep the representatives of 'their' organization, of 'their' region, permanently in power so as to ensure their own position and to maintain the former separation, the unqualified labor and the irrational production – transferring the burden to the workers. Among themselves they behave like the representatives of monopoly ownership... On the other hand, there is a profoundly socialist, self-governing tendency, a movement which has already begun to stir..." (Pecujlic in *Ibid.*)

This profoundly socialist tendency represents a struggle against the dependence and helplessness which allows workers to be exploited with the products of their own labor; it represents a struggle for control of all social activities by those who perform them. Yet what form can this struggle take in a society which already proclaims self-organization and self-control as its social, economic and legal system? What forms of revolutionary struggle can be developed in a context where a communist party already holds state power, and where this communist party has already proclaimed the end of bureaucratic rule and raised self-management to the level of an official ideology? The struggle, clearly, cannot consist of the expropriation of the capitalist class, since this expropriation has already taken place; nor can the struggle consist of the taking of state power by a revolutionary Marxist party, since such a party has already wielded state power for a quarter of a century. It is of course possible to do the thing over again, and to convince oneself that the outcome will be better the second time than the first. But the political imagination is not so poor that it need limit its perspectives to past failures. It is today realized, in Yugoslavia as elsewhere, that the expropriation of the capitalist class and its replacement by "the organization of the working class" (i.e. the Communist Party), that the taking of national-state power by "the organization of the working class" and even the official proclamation of various types of "socialism" by the Communist Party in power, are already historical realities, and that they have not meant the end of commodity production, alienated labor,

forced labor, nor the beginning of popular self-organization and self-control.

Consequently, forms of organized struggle which have already proved themselves efficient instruments for the acceleration of industrialization and for rationalizing social relations in terms of the model of the Brave New World, cannot be the forms of organization of a struggle for independent and critical initiative and control on the part of the entire working population. The taking of state power by the bureau of a political party is nothing more than what the words say, even if this party calls itself "the organization of the working class," and even if it calls its own rule "the Dictatorship of the Proletariat" or "Workers' Self-Management." Furthermore, Yugoslav experience does not even show that the taking of state power by the "organization of the working class" is a stage on the way toward workers' control of social production, or even that the official proclamation of "workers' self-management" is a stage towards its realization. The Yugoslav experiment would represent such a stage, at least historically, only in case Yugoslav workers were the first in the world to initiate a successful struggle for the de-alienation of power at all levels of social life. However, Yugoslav workers have not initiated such a struggle. As in capitalist societies, students have initiated such a struggle, and Yugoslav students were not among the first.

The conquest of state power by a political party which uses a Marxist vocabulary in order to manipulate the working class must be distinguished from another, very different historical task: the overthrow of commodity relations and the establishment of socialist relations. For over half a century, the former has been presented in the guise of the latter. The rise of a "new left" has put an end to this confusion; the revolutionary movement which is experiencing a revival on a world scale is characterized precisely by its refusal to push a party bureaucracy into state power, and by its opposition to such a bureaucracy where it is already in power.

Party ideologues argue that the "new left" in capitalist societies has nothing in common with student revolts in "socialist countries." Such a view, at best, is exaggerated: with respect to Yugoslavia it can at most be said that the Yugoslav student movement is not as highly developed as in some capitalist countries: until June, 1968, Yugoslav students were

known for their political passivity, pro-United States sympathies and petit-bourgeois life goals. However, despite the wishes of the ideologues, Yugoslav students have not remained far behind; the search for new forms of organization adequate for the tasks of socialist revolution has not remained alien to Yugoslav students. In May, 1968, while a vast struggle to de-alienate all forms of separate social power was gaining historical experience in France, the topic "Students and Politics" was discussed at the Belgrade Faculty of Law. The "theme which set the tone of the discussion" was: "...the possibility for human engagement in the 'new left' movement which, in the words of Dr. S. Stojanovic, opposes the mythology of the 'welfare state' with its classical bourgeois democracy, and also the classical left parties – the social-democratic parties which have succeeded by all possible means in blunting revolutionary goals in developed Western societies, as well as the communist parties which often discredited the original ideals for which they fought, frequently losing them altogether in remarkably bureaucratic deformations." ("The Topic is Action," *Student*, May 14, 1968, p. 4.)

By May, 1968, Yugoslav students had a great deal in common with their comrades in capitalist societies. A front page editorial of the Belgrade student newspaper said, "the tension of the present social-political situation is made more acute by the fact that there are no quick and easy solutions to numerous problems. Various forms of tension are visible in the University, and the lack of perspectives, the lack of solutions to numerous problems, is at the root of various forms of behavior. Feeling this, many are asking if the tension might be transformed into conflict, into a serious political crisis, and what form this crisis will take. Some think the crisis cannot be avoided, but can only be blunted, because there is no quick and efficient way to affect conditions which characterize the entire social structure, and which are the direct causes of the entire situation." ("Signs of Political Crisis," *Student*, May 21, 1968, p. 1.) The same front page of the student paper carried the following quotation from Marx, on "the veiled alienation at the heart of labor": "...Labor produces wonders for the rich, but misery for the worker. It produces palaces, but a hovel for the worker. It produces beauty, but horror for the worker. It replaces labor with machines, but throws part of the workers backward into barbarian work, and trans-



forms the other part into machines. It produces spirit, but for the worker it produces stupidity and cretinism.”

The same month, the editorial of the Belgrade Youth Federation journal said, “...the revolutionary role of Yugoslav students, in our opinion, lies in their engagement to deal with general social problems and contradictions (among which the problems and contradictions of the social and material situation of students are included). Special student problems, no matter how drastic, cannot be solved in isolation, separate from the general social problems: the material situation of students cannot be separated from the economic situation of the society; student self-government cannot be separated from the social problems of self-government; the situation of the University from the situation of society...” (*Susret*, May 15, 1968). The following issue of the same publication contained a discussion on “the Conditions and the Content of Political Engagement for Youth Today” which included the following observation: “University reform is thus not possible without reform or, why not, revolutionizing of the entire society, because the university cannot be separated from the wider spectrum of social institutions. From this it follows that freedom of thought and action, namely autonomy for the University, is only possible if the entire society is transformed, and if thus transformed it makes possible a general climate of freedom and self-government.” (*Susret*, June 1, 1968.)

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In April, 1968, like their comrades in capitalist countries, Yugoslav students demonstrated their solidarity with the Vietnamese National Liberation Front and their opposition to United States militarism. When Rudi Dutschke was shot in Berlin as a consequence of the Springer Press campaign against radical West German students, Yugoslav students demonstrated their solidarity with the German Socialist Student Federation (S.D.S.). The Belgrade student newspaper carried articles by Rudi Dutschke and by the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch. The experience of the world student movement was communicated to Yugoslav students. “Student revolts which have taken

place in many countries this year have shown that youth are able to carry out important projects in the process of changing a society. It can be said that these revolts have influenced circles in our University, since it is obvious that courage and the will to struggle have increased, that the critical consciousness of numerous students has sharpened (revolution is often the topic of intellectual discussion)." (*Student*, April 23, 1968, p. 1.) As for the forms of organization through which this will to struggle could express itself, Paris provided an example. "What is completely new and extremely important in the new revolutionary movement of the Paris students – but also of German, Italian and U.S. students – is that the movement was possible only because it was independent of all existing political organizations. All of these organizations, including the Communist Party, have become part of the system; they have become integrated into the rules of the daily parliamentary game; they have hardly been willing to risk the positions they've already reached to throw themselves into this insanely courageous and at first glance hopeless operation." (M. Markovic, *Student*, May 21, 1968.)

Another key element which contributed to the development of the Yugoslav student movement was the experience of Belgrade students with the bureaucracy of the student union. In April, students at the Philosophy Faculty composed a letter protesting the repression of Marxist intellectuals in Poland. "All over the world today, students are at the forefront in the struggle to create a human society, and thus we are profoundly surprised by the reactions of the Polish socialist regime. Free critical thought cannot be suppressed by any kind of power, not even by that which superficially leans on socialist ideals. For us, young Marxists, it is incomprehensible that today, in a socialist country, it is possible to tolerate anti-Semitic attacks and to use them for the solution of internal problems. We consider it unacceptable that after Polish socialism experienced so many painful experiences in the past, internal conflicts should be solved by such undemocratic means and that in their solution Marxist thought is persecuted. We also consider unscrupulous the attempts to separate and create conflict between the progressive student movement and the working class whose full emancipation is also the students' goal..." (*Student*, April 23, 1968, p. 4.) An assembly of students at the Philosophy Faculty sent this letter to Poland

– and the University Board of the Yugoslav Student Union opposed the action. Why? The philosophy students themselves analyzed the function, and the interests, of their own bureaucracy: “The University Board of the Yugoslav Student Union was in a situation in which it had lost its political nerve, it could not react, it felt weak and did not feel any obligation to do something. Yet when this body was not asked, when its advice was not heard, action ‘should not have been taken.’ This is bad tactics and still worse respect for democracy which must come to full expression in young people, like students. Precisely at the moment when the University Board had lost its understanding of the essence of the action, the discussion was channeled to the terrain of formalities: ‘Whose opinion should have been sought?’ ‘Whose permission should have been gotten?’ It wasn’t asked who would begin an action in this atmosphere of passivity. Is it not paradoxical that the University Board turns against an action which was initiated precisely by its own members and not by any forum, if we keep in mind that the basic principle of our socialism is SELF-MANAGEMENT, which means decision-making in the ranks of the members. In other words, our sin was that we applied our basic right of self-management. Organization can never be an end in itself, but only a means for the realization of ends. The greatest value of our action lies precisely in the fact that it was initiated by the rank and file, without directives or instructions from above, without crass institutionalized forms.” (*Ibid.*)

With these elements – an awareness of the inseparability of university problems from the social relations of a society based on alienated labor, an awareness of the experience of the international “new left,” and an awareness of the difference between self-organization by the rank and file and bureaucratic organization – the Belgrade students moved to action. The incident which set off the actions was minor. On the night of June 2, 1968, a performance which was to be held outdoors near the students’ dormitories in New Belgrade, was held in a small room indoors; students who had come to see the performance could not get in. A spontaneous demonstration began, which soon included thousands of students; the demonstrators began to walk toward the government buildings. They were stopped, as in capitalist societies, by the police (who are officially called a “militia” in the self-managed

language of Yugoslavia); students were beaten by militia batons; many were arrested.

The following day, June 3, continuous general assemblies were held in most of the faculties which compose the University of Belgrade (renamed The Red University Karl Marx), and also in the streets of New Belgrade. "In their talks students emphasized the gross social differentiation of Yugoslav society, the problem of unemployment, the increase of private property and the unearned wealth of one social layer, the unbearable condition of a large section of the working class and the need to carry out the principle of distribution according to labor consistently. The talks were interrupted by loud applause, by calls like 'Students with Workers,' 'We're sons of working people,' 'Down with the Socialist Bourgeoisie,' 'Freedom of the press and freedom to demonstrate!'" (*Student*, special issue, June 4, 1968, p. 1.)

Police repression was followed by press repression. The Yugoslav (Communist) press did not communicate the students' struggle to the rest of the population. It communicated a struggle of students for student-problems, a struggle of a separate group for greater privileges, a struggle which had not taken place. The front page of the June 4 issue of *Student*, which was banned by Belgrade authorities, describes the attempt of the press to present a nascent revolutionary struggle as a student revolt for special privileges: "The press has once again succeeded in distorting the events at the University... According to the press, students are fighting to improve their own material conditions. Yet everyone who took part in the meetings and demonstrations knows very well that the students were already turned in another direction – toward a struggle which encompasses the general interests of our society, above all a struggle for the interests of the working class. This is why the announcements sent out by the demonstrators emphasized above all else the decrease of unjustified social differences. According to the students, this struggle (against social inequality) in addition to the struggle for relations of self-government and reform, is of central importance to the working class and to Yugoslavia today. The newspapers did not quote a single speaker who talked about unjustified social differences... The newspapers also omitted the main slogans called out during the meetings and demonstrations: For the Unity of Workers and

Students, Students with Workers, and similar slogans which expressed a single idea and a single feeling: that the roads and interests of students are inseparable from those of the working class.” (*Student*, June 4, 1968, p. 1.)

By June 5, The Yugoslav Student Federation had succeeded in gaining leadership over the growing movement, and in becoming its spokesman. The student organization proclaimed a “Political Action Program” which contained the revolutionary goals expressed by the students in the assemblies, meetings and demonstrations – but the program also contained, as if by way of an appendix, a “Part II” on “university reform.” This appendix later played a key role in putting the newly awakened Yugoslav student movement back to sleep. Part I of the political action program emphasized social inequality first of all, unemployment, “democratization of all social and political organizations, particularly the League of Communists,” the degeneration of social property into private property, speculation in housing, commercialization of culture. Yet Part II, which was probably not even read by radical students who were satisfied with the relatively accurate expression of their goals in Part I, expresses a very different, in fact an opposite orientation. The first “demand” of Part II already presupposes that none of the goals expressed in Part I will be fulfilled: it is a demand for the adaptation of the university to the present requirements of the Yugoslav social system, namely a demand for technocratic reform which satisfies the requirements of Yugoslavia’s commercial-technocratic regime: “Immediate reform of the school system to adapt it to the requirements of the social and cultural development of our economy and our self-management relations...” (*Student*, special issue, June 8, 1968, pp. 1–2.)

This crude reversal, this manipulation of the student revolt so as to make it serve the requirements of the dominant social relations against which the students had revolted, did not become evident until the following school year. The immediate reactions of the regime were far less subtle: they consisted of repression, isolation, separation. The forms of police repression included beatings and jailings, a ban on the student newspaper which carried the only complete report of the events, demonstrations and meetings, and on the night of June 6, “two agents

of the secret police and a militia officer brutally attacked students distributing the student paper, grabbed 600 copies of the paper, tore them to pieces and burned them. All this took place in front of a large group of citizens who had gathered to receive copies of the paper.” (*Student*, June 8, 1968, p. 3.)

In addition to police repression, the dominant interests succeeded in isolating and separating the students from the workers, they temporarily succeeded in their “unscrupulous attempt to separate and create conflict between the progressive student movement and the working class whose full emancipation is also the students’ goal.” This was done in numerous ways. The ban on the student press and misreporting by the official press kept workers ignorant of the students’ goals; enterprise directors and their circles of experts “explained” the student struggle to “their” workers, instructed workers to defend “their” factories from attacks by “violent” students, and then sent letters to the press, in the name of the “workers’ collective,” congratulating the police for saving Yugoslav self-management from the violent students. “According to what is written and said, it turns out that it was the students who used force on the National Militia, that they blocked militia stations and surrounded them. Everything which has characterized the student movement from the beginning, in the city and in the university buildings, the order and self-control, is described with the old word: violence... This bureaucracy, which wants to create a conflict between workers and students, is inside the League of Communists, in the enterprises and in the state offices, and it is particularly powerful in the press (the press is an outstandingly hierarchic structure which leans on self-management only to protect itself from critiques and from responsibility). Facing the workers’ and students’ movement, the bureaucracy feels that it’s losing the ground from under its feet, that it’s losing those dark places where it prefers to move – and in fear cries out its meaningless claims.... Our movement urgently needs to tie itself with the working class. It has to explain its basic principles, and it has to ensure that these principles are realized, that they become richer and more complex, that they don’t remain mere slogans. But this is precisely what the bureaucracy fears, and this is why they instruct workers to protect the factories from students, this is why they say that students are

destroying the factories. What a monumental idiocy!” (D. Vukovic in *Student*, June 8, 1968, p. 1) Thus the self-managed directors of Yugoslav socialism protected Yugoslav workers from Yugoslav students just as, a few weeks earlier, the French “workers’ organizations” (the General Federation of Labor and the French Communist Party) had protected French workers from socialist revolution.

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Repression and separation did not put an end to the Yugoslav revolutionary movement. General assemblies continued to take place, students continued to look for forms of organization which could unite them with workers, and which were adequate for the task of transforming society. The third step was to pacify and, if possible, to recuperate the movement so as to make it serve the needs of the very structure it had fought against. This step took the form of a major speech by Tito, printed in the June 11 issue of *Student*. In a society in which the vast majority of people consider the “cult of personality” in China the greatest sin on earth, the vast majority of students applauded the following words of the man whose picture has decorated all Yugoslav public institutions, many private houses, and most front pages of daily newspapers for a quarter of a century: “...Thinking about the demonstrations and what preceded them, I have reached the conclusion that the revolt of the young people, of the students, rose spontaneously. However, as the demonstrations developed and when later they were transferred from the street to university auditoriums, a certain infiltration gradually took place on the part of foreign elements who wanted to use this situation for their own purposes. These include various tendencies and elements, from the most reactionary to the most extreme, seemingly radical elements who hold parts of Mao Tse Tung’s theories.” After this attempt to isolate and separate revolutionary students by shifting the problem from the content of the ideas to the source of the ideas (foreign elements with foreign ideas), the President of the Republic tries to recuperate the good, domestic students who only have local ideas. “However, I’ve come to the conclusion that the vast majority of students, I can say 90%, are honest youth... The newest

developments at the universities have shown that 90% of the students are our socialist youth, who do not let themselves be poisoned, who do not allow the various Djilasites, Rankovicites, Mao-Tse-Tungites realize their own goals on the pretext that they're concerned about the students... Our youth are good, but we have to devote more attention to them." Having told students how they should not allow themselves to be used, the President of Self-Managed Yugoslavia tells them how they should allow themselves to be used. "I turn, comrades and workers, to our students, so that they'll help us in a constructive approach and solution of all these problems. May they follow what we're doing, that is their right; may they take part in our daily life, and when anything is not clear, when anything has to be cleared up, may they come to me. They can send a delegation." As for the content of the struggle, its goals, Tito speaks to kindergarten children and promises them that he will personally attend to every single one of their complaints. "...The revolt is partly a result of the fact that the students saw that I myself have often asked these questions, and even so they have remained unsolved. This time I promise students that I will engage myself on all sides to solve them, and in this students must help me. Furthermore, if I'm not able to solve these problems then I should no longer be on this place. I think that every old communist who has the consciousness of a communist should not insist on staying where he is, but should give his place to people who are able to solve problems. And finally I turn to students once again: it's time to return to your studies, it's time for tests, and I wish you success. It would really be a shame if you wasted still more time." (Tito in *Student*, June 11, 1968, pp. 1-2.)

This speech, which in itself represents a self-exposure, left open only two courses of action: either a further development of the movement completely outside of the clearly exposed political organizations, or else co-optation and temporary silence. The Yugoslav movement was co-opted and temporarily silenced. Six months after the explosion, in December, the Belgrade Student Union officially adopted the political action program proclaimed in June. This version of the program included a Part I, on the social goals of the struggle, a Part II, on university reform, and a newly added Part III, on steps to be taken. In Part III it is explained that, "in realizing the program the method of work has to



be kept in mind. 1) The Student Union is not able to participate directly in the solution of the general social problems (Part I of the program)... 2) The Student Union is able to participate directly in the struggle to reform the University and the system of higher education as a whole (Part II of the program), and to be the spokesman of progressive trends in the University.” (*Student*, December 17, 1969, p. 3.) Thus several events have taken place since June. The students’ struggle has been institutionalized: it has been taken over by the “students’ organization.” Secondly, two new elements have been appended to the original goals of the June struggle: a program of university reform, and a method for realizing the goals. And, finally, the initial goals of the struggle are abandoned to the social groups against whom the students had revolted. What was once an appendix has now become the only part of the program on which students are to act: “university reform.” Thus the revolt against the managerial elite has been cynically turned into its opposite: the university is to be adapted to serve the needs of the dominant system of social relations; students are to be trained to serve the managerial elite more effectively.

While the “students’ organization” initiates the “struggle” for university reform, the students, who had begun to organize themselves to struggle for very different goals, once again become passive and politically indifferent. “June was characterized by a burst of consciousness among the students; the period after June in many ways has the characteristics of the period before June, which can be explained by the inadequate reaction of society to the June events and to the goals expressed in June.” (*Student*, May 13, 1969, P. 4.)

The struggle to overthrow the status quo has been turned away from its insanity; it has been made realistic; it has been transformed into a struggle to serve the status quo. This struggle, which the students do not engage in because “their organization” has assumed the task of managing it for them, is not accompanied by meetings, general assemblies or any other form of self-organization. This is because the students had not fought for “university reform” before June or during June, and they do not become recuperated for this “struggle” after June. It is in fact mainly the “students’ spokesmen” who have become recuperated, because what was known before June is still known after June:

“Improvement of the University makes sense only if it is based on the axiom that transformations of the university depend on transformations of the society. The present condition of the University reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, the condition of the society. In the light of this fact, it is meaningless to hold that we’ve argued about general social problems long enough, and that the time has come to turn our attention to university reform.” (B. Jaksic in *Susret*, February 19, 1969.)

The content of “university reform” is defined by the Rector of the University of Belgrade. In his formulation, published in *Student* half a year after the June events, the Rector even includes “goals” which the students had specifically fought against, such as separation from the working class for a price, and the systematic integration of students, not only into the technocracy, but into the armed forces as well: “The struggle to improve the material position of the university and of students is our constant task... One of the key questions of present-day work at the university is the imperative to struggle against all forms of defeatism and demagoguery. Our university, and particularly our student youth, are and will be the enthusiastic and sure defense of our socialist homeland. Systematic organization in the building of the defensive power of our country against every aggressor, from whatever side he may try to attack us, must be the constant, quick and efficient work of all of us.” (D. Ivanovic in *Student*, October 15, 1968, p. 4.) These remarks were preceded by long and very abstract statements to the effect that “self-management is the content of university reform.” The more specific remarks quoted above make it clear what the Rector understands to be the “content” of “self-management.”

Since students do not eagerly throw themselves into the “struggle” for university reform, the task is left to the experts who are interested in it, the professors and the academic functionaries. “The main topics of conversation of a large number of teachers and their colleagues are automobiles, weekend houses and the easy life. These are also the main topics of conversation of the social elite which is so sharply criticized in the writings of these academics who do not grasp that they are an integral and not unimportant part of this elite.” (B. Jaksic in *Susret*, February 19, 1969.)

Under the heading of University reform, one of Yugoslavia's leading (official) economists advocates a bureaucratic utopia with elements of magic. The same economist who, some years ago, had emphasized the arithmetical "balances of national production" developed by Soviet "social engineers" for application on human beings by a state bureaucracy, now advocates "the application of General Systems Theory for the analysis of concrete social systems." This General Systems Theory is the latest scientific discovery of "developed and progressive social systems" – like the United States. Due to this fact, "General Systems Theory has become indispensable for all future experts in fields of social science, and also for all other experts, whatever domain of social development they may participate in." (R. Stojanovic, "On the Need to Study General Systems Theory at Social Science Faculties," *Student*, February 25, 1969.) If, through university reform, General Systems Theory can be drilled into the heads of all future Yugoslav technocrats, presumably Yugoslavia will magically become a "developed and progressive social system" – namely a commercial, technocratic and military bureaucracy, a wonderland for human engineering.

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The students have been separated from the workers; their struggle has been recuperated: it has become an occasion for academic bureaucrats to serve the commercial-technocratic elite more effectively. The bureaucrats encourage students to "self-manage" this "university reform," to participate in shaping themselves into businessmen, technicians and managers. Meanwhile, Yugoslav workers produce more than they've ever produced before, and watch the products of their labor increase the wealth and power of other social groups, groups which use that power against the workers. According to the Constitution, the workers govern themselves. However, according to a worker interviewed by *Student*, "That's only on paper. When the managers choose their people, workers have to obey; that's how it is here." (*Student*, March 4, 1969, p. 4.) If a worker wants to initiate a struggle against the continually increasing social inequality of wealth and power, he is checked by Yugoslavia's enormous unemployment: a vast reserve army of unem-

ployed waits to replace him, because the only alternative is to leave Yugoslavia. The workers still have a powerful instrument with which to “govern themselves”; it is the same instrument workers have in capitalist societies: the strike. However, according to one analyst, strikes of workers who are separated from the revolutionary currents of the society and separated from the rest of the working class, namely “economic” strikes, have not increased the power of workers in Yugoslav society; the effect is nearly the opposite: “What has changed after eleven years of experience with strikes? Wherever they broke out, strikes reproduced precisely those relations which had led to strikes. For example, workers rebel because they’re shortchanged in the distribution; then someone, probably the one who previously shortchanged them, gives them what he had taken from them; the strike ends and the workers continue to be hired laborers. And the one who gave in did so in order to maintain his position as the one who gives, the one who saves the workers. In other words, relations of wage-labor, which are in fact the main cause of the strike as a method for resolving conflicts, continue to be reproduced. This leads to another question: is it at all possible for the working class to emancipate itself in a full sense within the context of an enterprise, or is that a process which has to develop on the level of the entire society, a process which does not tolerate any separation between different enterprises, branches, republics?” (*Susret*, April 18, 1969.)

As for the experts who shortchange the working class, *Student* carried a long description of various forms of expertise: “1) Enterprise functionaries (directors, businessmen, traveling salesmen, etc.) are paid by the managing board, the workers’ council or other self-managed organs, for breaking legal statutes or moral norms in ways that are economically advantageous to the enterprise... 2)... 3) Fictitious or simulated jobs are performed for purposes of tax evasion... 4)... 5) Funds set aside for social consumption are given out for the construction of private apartments, weekend houses, or for the purchase of automobiles...” (*Student*, February 18, 1969, p. 1.)

The official ideology of Socialist Yugoslavia does not conflict with the interests of its commercial-technocratic elite; in fact it provides a justification for those interests. In March, 1969, the Resolution of the Ninth

Congress of the Yugoslav League of Communists referred to critiques by June revolutionaries only to reject them, and to reaffirm the official ideology. The absurd contention according to which commodity production remains the central social relation in "socialism" is restated in this document. "The economic laws of commodity production in socialism act as a powerful support to the development of modern productive forces and rational management." This statement is justified by means of the now-familiar demonology, namely by the argument that the only alternative to commodity production in "socialism" is Stalin: "Administrative-bureaucratic management of administration and social reproduction deforms real relations and forms monopolies, namely bureaucratic subjectivism in the conditions of management, and unavoidably leads to irrationality and parasitism in the distribution of the social product..." Thus the choice is clear: either maintain the status quo, or else return to the system which the same League of Communists had imposed on Yugoslav society before 1948. The same type of demonology is used to demolish the idea that "to each according to his work," the official slogan of Yugoslavia, means what the words say. Such an interpretation "ignores differences in abilities and contributions. Such a demand leads to the formation of an all-powerful administrative, bureaucratic force, above production and above society; a force which institutes artificial and superficial equalization, and whose power leads to need, inequality and privilege..." (*Student*, March 18, 1969.) The principle "to each according to his work" was historically developed by the capitalist class in its struggle against the landed aristocracy, and in present day Yugoslavia this principle has the same meaning that it had for the bourgeoisie. Thus the enormous personal income (and bonuses) of a successful commercial entrepreneur in a Yugoslav import-export firm is justified with this slogan, since his financial success proves both his superior ability as well as the value of his contribution to society. In other words, distribution takes place in terms of the social evaluation of one's labor, and in a commodity economy labor is evaluated on the market. The result is a system of distribution which can be summarized by the slogan "from each according to his ability, to each according to his market success," a slogan which describes a system of social relations widely known as

capitalist commodity production, and not as socialism (which was defined by Marx as the negation of capitalist commodity production).

The defense of this document was not characterized by more subtle methods of argument, but rather by the type of conservative complacency which simply takes the status quo for granted as the best of all possible worlds. "I can hardly accept critiques which are not consistent with the spirit of this material and with the basic ideas which it really contains... Insistence on a conception which would give rational solutions to all the relations and problems we confront, seems to me to go beyond the real possibilities of our society... This is our reality. The different conditions of work in individual enterprises, in individual branches, in individual regions of the country and elsewhere – we cannot eliminate them..." (V. Rakic in *Student*, March 11, 1969, p. 12.)

In another issue of *Student*, this type of posture was characterized in the following terms: "A subject who judges everything consistent and radical as an exaggeration identifies himself with what objectively exists; thus everything seems to him too idealistic, abstract, Quixotic, unreal, too far-fetched for our reality, and never for him. Numerous people, particularly those who could contribute to the transformation of society, continually lean on reality, on the obstacles which it presents, not seeing that often it is precisely they, with their superficial sense for reality, with their so-called real-politik, who are themselves the obstacles whose victims they claim to be." (D. Grlic in *Student*, April 28, 1969, p. 3.)

"We cannot allow ourselves to forget that democracy (not to speak of socialism) as well as self-government in an alienated and ideological form, may become a dangerous instrument for promulgating and spreading the illusion that by 'introducing' it, namely through a proclamation, a decree on self-management, we've chosen the right to independent control, which eo ipso negates the need for any kind of struggle. Against whom, and why should we struggle when we already govern ourselves; now we are ourselves – and not anyone above us – guilty for all our shortcomings." (*Ibid.*)

The socialist ideology of Yugoslavia has been shown to be hollow; the ruling elite has been deprived of its justifications. But as yet the exposure has taken the form of critical analysis, of revolutionary theory.

Revolutionary practice, self-organization by the base, as yet has little experience. In the meantime, those whose struggle for socialism has long ago become a struggle to keep themselves in power, continue to identify their own rule with self-government of the working class, they continue to define the commodity economy whose ideologues they have become as the world's most democratic society. In May 1969, the newly elected president of the Croatian parliament, long-time member of the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party, blandly stated that "the facts about the most basic indexes of our development show and prove that the economic development of the Socialist Republic of Croatia, and of Yugoslavia as a whole, has been harmonious and progressive." The president is aware of unemployment and the forced exile of Yugoslav workers, but the problem is about to be solved because "Some actions have been initiated to deal with the concern over our people who are temporarily employed abroad; these actions must be systematized, improved, and included as an integral part of our system, our economy and our polity..." The president is also aware of profound critiques of the present arrangement, and for him these are "illusions, confusions, desperation, impatience, Quixotic pretensions which are manifested – regardless of the seeming contradiction – from leftist revolutionary phrases to chauvinistic trends which take the form of philosophy, philology, movement of the labor force, economic situation of the nation, republic, etc... We must energetically reject attempts to dramatize and generalize certain facts which, pulled out of the context of our entire development and our reality, attempt to use them for defeatist, demoralizing, and at times chauvinistic actions. We must systematically and factually inform our working people of these attempts, we must point out their elements, their methods, their real intentions, and the meaning of the actions." (J. Blazevic, *Vjesnik*, May 9, 1969, p. 2.)

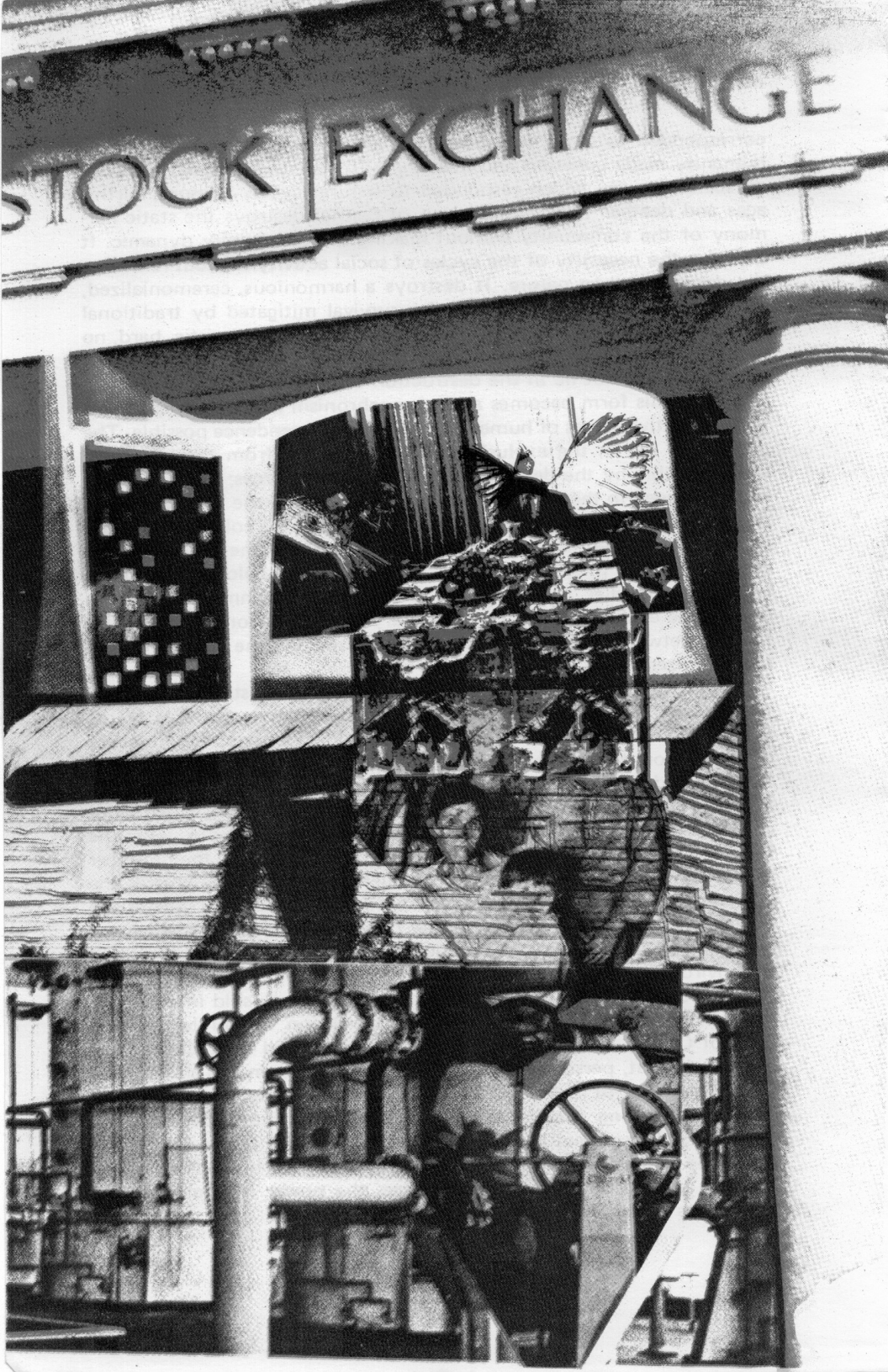
Official reactions to the birth of the Yugoslav "new left," from those of the President of Yugoslavia to those of the President of Croatia, are humorously summarized in a satire published on the front page of the May 13 issue of *Student*. "...Many of our opponents declare themselves for democracy, but what they want is some kind of pure or full democracy, some kind of libertarianism. In actual fact they're fighting for their

own positions, so as to be able to speak and work according to their own will and the way they think right. We reject all the attempts of these anti-democratic forces; in our society it must be clear to everyone who is responsible to whom... In the struggle against these opponents, we're not going to use undemocratic means unless democratic means do not show adequate success. An excellent example of the application of democratic methods of struggle is our confrontation with bureaucratic forces. We all know that in the recent past, bureaucracy was our greatest social evil. And where is that bureaucracy now? It melted, like snow. Under the pressure of our self-managing mechanisms and our democratic forces, it melted all by itself, automatically, and we did not even need to make any changes whatever in the personnel or the structures of our national government, which in any case would not have been consistent with self-management. The opponents attack our large social differences, and they even call them unjustified... But the working class, the leading and ruling force of our society, the carrier of progressive trends and the historical subject, must not become privileged at the expense of other social categories; it must be ready to sacrifice in the name of the further construction of our system. The working class is aware of this and decisively rejects all demands for a radical decrease in social differences, since these are in essence demands for equalization; and this, above all else, would lead to a society of poor people. But our goal is a society in which everyone will be rich and will get according to his needs... The problem of unemployment is also constantly attacked by enemy forces. Opponents of our system argue that we should not make such a fuss about creating new jobs (as if that was as easy as opening windows in June), and that trained young people would accelerate the economic reform... In the current phase of our development we were not able to create more jobs, but we created another type of solution – we opened our frontiers and allowed our workers free employment abroad. Obviously it would be nice if we all had work here, at home. Even the Constitution says that. But that cannot be harmonized with the new phase of our reform. However, the struggle for reform has entered its final, conclusive stage and things will improve significantly. In actual fact, our people don't have it so bad even now. Earlier they could work only for one state, now they can work for the



entire world. What's one state to the entire world? This creates mutual understanding and friendship... We were obviously unable to describe all the enemies of our system, such as various extremists, leftists, rightists, anarcho-liberals, radicals, demagogues, teachers, dogmatics, would-be-revolutionaries (who go so far as to claim that our revolution has fallen into crisis), anti-reformists and informal groups..., unitarians, folklorists, and many other elements. All of them represent potential hotbeds of crisis. All these informal groups and extremists must be energetically isolated from society, and if possible re-formed so as to prevent their destructive activity." (V. Teofilovic in *Student*, May 13, 1969, p. 1.)

The Yugoslav experience adds new elements to the experience of the world revolutionary movement; the appearance of these elements has made it clear that socialist revolution is not a historical fact in Yugoslavia's past, but a struggle in the future. This struggle has been initiated, but it has nowhere been carried out. "For as Babeuf wrote, managers organize a revolution in order to manage, but an authentic revolution is only possible from the bottom, as a mass movement. Society, all of its spontaneous human activity, rises as a historical subject and creates the identity of politics and popular will which is the basis for the elimination of politics as a form of human alienation." (M. Vojnovic in *Student*, April 22, 1969, p. 1.) Revolution in this sense cannot even be conceived within the confines of a single university, a single factory, a single nation-state. Furthermore, revolution is not the repetition of an event which already took place, somewhere, sometime; it is not the reproduction of past relations, but the creation of new ones. In the words of another Yugoslav writer, "it is not only a conflict between production and creation, but in a larger sense – and here I have in mind the West as well as the East – between routine and adventure." (M. Krleža in *Politika*, December 29, 1968; quoted in *Student*, January 7, 1969.)



## **PART TWO: CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

## The Reproduction of Daily Life

Originally printed as a 24 page pamphlet in 1969, this essay gives a clear and concise explanation of how social relations sustain themselves.

The everyday practical activity of tribesmen reproduces, or perpetuates, a tribe. This reproduction is not merely physical, but social as well. Through their daily activities the tribesmen do not merely reproduce a group of human beings; they reproduce a tribe, namely a particular *social form* within which this group of human beings performs *specific* activities in a *specific* manner. The specific activities of the tribesmen are not the outcome of “natural” characteristics of the men who perform them, the way the production of honey is an outcome of the “nature” of a bee. The daily life enacted and perpetuated by the tribesman is a specific *social* response to particular material and historical conditions.

The everyday activity of slaves reproduces slavery. Through their daily activities, slaves do not merely reproduce themselves and their masters physically; they also reproduce the instruments with which the master represses them, and their own habits of submission to the master’s authority. To men who live in a slave society, the master-slave relation seems like a natural and eternal relation. However, men are not born masters or slaves. Slavery is a specific social form, and men submit to it only in very particular material and historical conditions.

The practical everyday activity of wage-workers reproduces wage labor and capital. Through their daily activities, “modern” men, like tribesmen and slaves, reproduce the inhabitants, the social relations and the ideas of their society; they reproduce the *social form* of daily life. Like the tribe and the slave system, the capitalist system is neither

the natural nor the final form of human society; like the earlier social forms, capitalism is a specific response to material and historical conditions.

Unlike earlier forms of social activity, everyday life in capitalist society *systematically* transforms the material conditions to which capitalism originally responded. Some of the material limits to human activity come gradually under human control. At a high level of industrialization, practical activity creates its own material conditions as well as its social form. Thus the subject of analysis is not only how practical activity in capitalist society reproduces capitalist society, but also how this activity itself eliminates the material conditions to which capitalism is a response.

## **Daily Life in Capitalist Society**

The social form of people's regular activities under capitalism is a response to a certain material and historical situation. The material and historical conditions explain the origin of the capitalist form, but do not explain why this form continues after the initial situation disappears. A concept of "cultural lag" is not an explanation of the continuity of a social form after the disappearance of the initial conditions to which it responded. This concept is merely a name for the continuity of the social form. When the concept of "cultural lag" parades as a name for a "social force" which determines human activity, it is an obfuscation which presents the outcome of people's activities as an external force beyond their control. This is not only true of a concept like "cultural lag." Many of the terms used by Marx to describe people's activities have been raised to the status of external and even "natural" forces which determine people's activity; thus concepts like "class struggle," "production relations" and particularly "The Dialectic," play the same role in the theories of some "Marxists" that "Original Sin," "Fate" and "The Hand of Destiny" played in the theories of medieval mystifiers.

In the performance of their daily activities, the members of capitalist society simultaneously carry out two processes: they reproduce the form of their activities, and they eliminate the material conditions to which this form of activity initially responded. But they do not know they carry out these processes; their own activities are not transparent

to them. They are under the illusion that their activities are responses to natural conditions beyond their control and do not see that they are themselves authors of those conditions. The task of capitalist ideology is to maintain the veil which keeps people from seeing that their own activities reproduce the form of their daily life; the task of critical theory is to unveil the activities of daily life, to render them transparent, to make the reproduction of the social form of capitalist activity visible within people's daily activities.

Under capitalism, daily life consists of related activities which reproduce and expand the capitalist form of social activity. The sale of labor-time for a price (a wage), the embodiment of labor-time in commodities (saleable goods, both tangible and intangible), the consumption of tangible and intangible commodities (such as consumer goods and spectacles) – these activities which characterize daily life under capitalism are not manifestations of “human nature,” nor are they imposed on men by forces beyond their control.

If it is held that man is “by nature” an uninventive tribesman and an inventive businessman, a submissive slave and a proud craftsman an independent hunter and a dependent wage-worker, then either man's “nature” is an empty concept, or man's “nature” depends on material and historical conditions, and is in fact a response to those conditions.

## **Alienation of Living Activity**

In capitalist society, creative activity takes the form of commodity production, namely production of marketable goods, and the results of human activity take the form of commodities. Marketability or saleability is the universal characteristic of all practical activity and all products. The products of human activity which are necessary for survival have the form of saleable goods: they are only available in exchange for money. And money is only available in exchange for commodities. If a large number of men accept the legitimacy of these conventions, if they accept the convention that commodities are a prerequisite for money, and that money is a prerequisite for survival, then they find themselves locked into a vicious circle. Since they have no commodities, their only exit from this circle is to regard themselves, or parts of themselves, as commodities. And this is, in fact, the peculiar

“solution” which men impose on themselves in the face of specific material and historical conditions. They do not exchange their bodies or parts of their bodies for money. They exchange the creative content of their lives, their practical daily activity, for money.

As soon as men accept money as an equivalent for life, the sale of living activity becomes a condition for their physical and social survival. Life is exchanged for survival. Creation and production come to mean sold activity. A man’s activity is “productive,” useful to society, only when it is sold activity. And the man himself is a productive member of society only if the activities of his daily life are sold activities. As soon as people accept the terms of this exchange, daily activity takes the form of universal prostitution.

The sold creative power, or sold daily activity, takes the form of *labor*; labor is a historically specific form of human activity; labor is abstract activity which has only one property; it is marketable; it can be sold for a given quantity of money; labor is *indifferent* activity; indifferent to the particular task performed and indifferent to the particular subject to which the task is directed. Digging, printing and carving are different activities, but all three are *labor* in capitalist society; labor is simply “earning money.” Living activity which takes the form of labor is a means to earn money. Life becomes a *means of survival*.

This ironic reversal is not the dramatic climax of an imaginative novel; it is a fact of daily life in capitalist society. Survival, namely self-preservation and reproduction, is not the means to creative practical activity, but precisely the other way around. Creative activity in the form of *labor*, namely *sold activity*, is a *painful necessity* for survival; labor is the means to self-preservation and reproduction.

The sale of living activity brings about another reversal. Through sale, the labor of an individual becomes the “property” of another, it is appropriated by another, it comes under the control of another. In other words, a person’s activity becomes the activity of another, the activity of its owner; it becomes *alien* to the person who performs it. Thus one’s *life*, the accomplishments of an individual in the world, the difference which his life makes in the life of humanity, are not only transformed into *labor*, a painful condition for survival; they are transformed into alien activity, activity performed by the buyer of that labor.

In capitalist society, the architects, the engineers, the laborers, are not builders; the man who buys their labor is the builder; their projects, calculations and motions are alien to them; their living activity, their accomplishments, are his.

Academic sociologists, who take the sale of labor for granted, understand this alienation of labor as a feeling: the worker's activity "appears" alien to the worker, it "seems" to be controlled by another. However, any worker can explain to the academic sociologists that the alienation is neither a feeling nor an idea in the worker's head, but a real fact about the worker's daily life. The sold activity is *in fact* alien to the worker; his labor is *in fact* controlled by its buyer.

In exchange for his sold activity, the worker gets money, the conventionally accepted means of survival in capitalist society. With this money he can buy commodities, things, but he cannot buy back his activity. This reveals a peculiar "gap" in money as the "universal equivalent." A person can sell commodities for money, and he can buy the same commodities with money. He can sell his living activity for money, but he cannot buy his living activity for money.

The things the worker buys with his wages are first of all consumer goods which enable him to survive, to reproduce his labor-power so as to be able to continue selling it. And they are spectacles, objects for passive admiration. He consumes and admires the products of human activity passively. He does not exist in the world as an active agent who transforms it. But as a helpless impotent spectator he may call this state of powerless admiration "happiness," and since labor is *painful*, he may desire to be "happy," namely inactive, all his life (a condition similar to being born dead). The commodities, the spectacles, *consume him*; he uses up living energy in passive admiration; he is consumed by things. In this sense, the more he has, the less he is. (An individual can surmount this death-in-life through marginal creative activity; but the population cannot, except by abolishing the capitalist form of practical activity, by abolishing wage-labor and thus de-alienating creative activity.)



## The Fetishism of Commodities

By alienating their activity and embodying it in commodities, in material receptacles of human labor, people reproduce themselves and create Capital. From the standpoint of capitalist ideology, and particularly of academic Economics, this statement is untrue: commodities are “not the product of labor alone”; they are produced by the primordial “factors of production,” Land, Labor and Capital, the capitalist Holy Trinity, and the main “factor” is obviously the hero of the piece, Capital.

The purpose of this superficial Trinity is not analysis, since analysis is not what these Experts are paid for. They are paid to obfuscate, to mask the social form of practical activity under capitalism, to veil the fact that producers reproduce themselves, their exploiters, as well as the instruments with which they’re exploited. The Trinity formula does not succeed in convincing. It is obvious that *land* is no more of a commodity producer than water, air, or the sun. Furthermore *Capital*, which is at once a name for a social relation between workers and capitalists, for the instruments of production owned by a capitalist, and for the money-equivalent of his instruments and “intangibles,” does not produce anything more than the ejaculations shaped into publishable form by the academic Economists. Even the instruments of production which are the capital of one capitalist are primordial “factors of production” only if one’s blinders limit his view to an isolated capitalist firm, since a view of the entire economy reveals that the capital of one capitalist is the material receptacle of the labor alienated to another capitalist. However, though the Trinity formula does not convince, it does accomplish the task of obfuscation by shifting the subject of the question: instead of asking why the activity of people under capitalism takes the form of wage-labor, potential analysts of capitalist daily life are transformed into academic house-Marxists who ask whether or not labor is the only “factor of production.”

Thus Economics (and capitalist ideology in general) treats land, money, and the products of labor, as things which have the power to produce, to create value, to work for their owners, to transform the world. This is what Marx called the *fetishism* which characterizes people’s everyday conceptions, and which is raised to the level of

dogma by Economics. For the economist, living people are *things* (“factors of production”), and things *live* (money “works,” Capital “produces”).

The fetish worshipper attributes the product of his own activity to his fetish. As a result, he ceases to exert his own power (the power to transform nature, the power to determine the form and content of his daily life); he exerts only those “powers” which he attributes to his fetish (the “power” to buy commodities). In other words, the fetish worshipper emasculates himself and attributes virility to his fetish.

But the fetish is a dead thing, not a living being; it has no virility. The fetish is no more than a thing for which, and through which, capitalist relations are maintained. The mysterious power of Capital, its “power” to produce, its virility, does not reside in itself, but in the fact that people alienate their creative activity, that they sell their labor to capitalists, that they materialize or reify their alienated labor in commodities. In other words, people are bought with the products of their own activity, yet they see their own activity as the activity of Capital, and their own products as the products of Capital. By attributing creative power to Capital and not to their own activity, they renounce their living activity, their everyday life, to Capital, which means that people *give themselves* daily, to the personification of Capital, the capitalist.

By selling their labor, by alienating their activity, people daily reproduce the personifications of the dominant forms of activity under capitalism; they reproduce the wage-laborer and the capitalist. They do not merely reproduce the individuals physically, but socially as well; they reproduce individuals who are sellers of labor-power, and individuals who are owners of means of production; they reproduce the individuals as well as the specific activities, the sale as well as the ownership.

Every time people perform an activity they have not themselves defined and do not control, every time they pay for goods they produced with money they received in exchange for their alienated activity, every time they passively admire the products of their own activity as alien objects procured by their money, they give new life to Capital and annihilate their own lives.

The aim of the process is the reproduction of the relation between the worker and the capitalist. However, this is not the aim of the indi-

vidual agents engaged in it. Their activities are not transparent to them; their eyes are fixed on the *fetish* that stands between the act and its result. The individual agents keep their eyes fixed on *things*, precisely those things for which capitalist relations are established. The worker as producer aims to exchange his daily labor for money-wages, he aims precisely for the thing through which his relation to the capitalist is re-established, the thing through which he reproduces himself as a wage-worker and the other as a capitalist. The worker as consumer exchanges his money for products of labor, precisely the things which the capitalist has to sell in order to realize his Capital.

The daily transformation of living activity into Capital is *mediated* by things, it is not *carried out* by the things. The fetish worshipper does not know this; for him labor and land, instruments and money, entrepreneurs and bankers, are all “factors” and “agents.” When a hunter wearing an amulet downs a deer with a stone, he may consider the amulet an essential “factor” in downing the deer and even in providing the deer as an object to be downed. If he is a responsible and well-educated fetish worshipper, he will devote his attention to his amulet, nourishing it with care and admiration; in order to improve the material conditions of his life, he will improve the way he wears his fetish, not the way he throws the stone; in a bind, he may even send his amulet to “hunt” for him. His own daily activities are not transparent to him: when he eats well, he fails to see that it is his own action of throwing the stone, and not the action of the amulet, that provided his food; when he starves, he fails to see that it is his own action of worshipping the amulet instead of hunting, and not the wrath of his fetish, that causes his starvation.

The fetishism of commodities and money, the mystification of one’s daily activities, the religion of everyday life which attributes living activity to inanimate things, is not a mental caprice born in men’s imaginations; it has its origin in the character of social relations under capitalism. Men do in fact relate to each other through things; the fetish is in fact the occasion for which they act collectively, and through which they reproduce their activity. But it is not the fetish that performs the activity. It is not Capital that transforms raw materials, nor Capital that produces goods. If living activity did not transform the materials,

these would remain untransformed, inert, dead matter. If men were not disposed to continue selling their living activity, the impotence of Capital would be revealed; Capital would cease to exist; its last remaining potency would be the power to remind people of a bypassed form of everyday life characterized by daily universal prostitution.

The worker alienates his life in order to preserve his life. If he did not sell his living activity he could not get a wage and could not survive. However, it is not the wage that makes alienation the condition for survival. If men were collectively not disposed to sell their lives, if they were disposed to take control over their own activities, universal prostitution would not be a condition for survival. It is people's disposition to continue selling their labor, and not the *things* for which they sell it, that makes the alienation of living activity necessary for the preservation of life.

The living activity sold by the worker is bought by the capitalist. And it is only this living activity that breathes life into Capital and makes it "productive." The capitalist, an "owner" of raw materials and instruments of production, presents natural objects and products of other people's labor as his own "private property." But it is not the mysterious power of Capital that creates the capitalist's "private property"; living activity is what creates the "property," and the form of that activity is what keeps it "private."

## **Transformation of Living Activity into Capital**

The transformation of living activity into Capital takes place *through* things, daily, but is not carried out *by* things. Things which are products of human activity *seem* to be active agents because activities and contacts are established for and through things, and because people's activities are not transparent to them; they confuse the mediating object with the cause.

In the capitalist process of production, the worker embodies or materializes his alienated living energy in an inert object by using instruments which are embodiments of other people's activity. Sophisticated industrial instruments embody the intellectual and manual activity of countless generations of inventors, improvers and producers from all corners of the globe and from varied forms of society. The

instruments in themselves are inert objects; they are material embodiments of living activity, but are not themselves alive. The only active agent in the production process is the living laborer. He uses the products of other people's labor and infuses them with life, so to speak, but the life is his own; he is not able to resurrect the individuals who stored their living activity in his instrument. The instrument may enable him to do more during a given time period, and in this sense it may raise his productivity. But only the living labor which is able to produce can be productive.

For example, when an industrial worker runs an electric lathe, he uses products of the labor of generations of physicists, inventors, electrical engineers, lathe makers. He is obviously more productive than a craftsman who carves the same object by hand. But it is in no sense the "Capital" at the disposal of the industrial worker which is more "productive" than the "Capital" of the craftsman. If generations of intellectual and manual activity had not been embodied in the electric lathe, if the industrial worker had to invent the lathe, electricity, and the electric lathe, then it would take him numerous lifetimes to turn a single object on an electric lathe, and no amount of Capital could raise his productivity above that of the craftsman who carves the object by hand.

The notion of the "productivity of capital," and particularly the detailed measurement of that "productivity," are inventions of the "science" of Economics, that religion of capitalist daily life which uses up people's energy in the worship, admiration and flattery of the central fetish of capitalist society. Medieval colleagues of these "scientists" performed detailed measurements of the height and width of angels in Heaven, without ever asking what angels or Heaven were, and taking for granted the existence of both.

The result of the worker's sold activity is a product which does not belong to him. This product is an embodiment of his labor, a materialization of a part of his life, a receptacle which contains his living activity, but it is not his; it is as alien to him as his labor. He did not decide to make it, and when it is made he does not dispose of it. If he wants it, he has to buy it. What he has made is not simply a product with certain useful properties. For that he did not need to sell his labor to a capitalist in exchange for a wage. He need only have picked the

necessary materials and the available tools, he need only have shaped the materials guided by his goals and limited by his knowledge and ability. It is obvious that an individual can only do this marginally. Men's appropriation and use of the materials and tools available to them can only take place after the overthrow of the capitalist form of activity.

What the worker produces under capitalist conditions is a product with a very specific property, the property of saleability. What his alienated activity produces is a *commodity*.

Because capitalist production is commodity production, the statement that the goal of the process is the satisfaction of human needs is false; it is a rationalization and an apology. The "satisfaction of human needs" is not the goal of the capitalist or of the worker engaged in production, nor is it a result of the process. The worker sells his labor in order to get a wage. The specific content of the labor is indifferent to him. He does not alienate his labor to a capitalist who does not give him a wage in exchange for it, no matter how many human needs this capitalist's products may satisfy. The capitalist buys labor and engages it in production in order to emerge with commodities which can be sold. He is indifferent to the specific properties of the product, just as he is indifferent to people's needs. All that interests him about the product is how much it will sell for, and all that interests him about people's needs is how much they "need" to buy and how they can be coerced, through propaganda and psychological conditioning, to "need" more. The capitalist's goal is to satisfy *his* need to reproduce and enlarge Capital, and the result of the process is the expanded reproduction of wage labor and Capital (which are not "human needs").

The commodity produced by the worker is exchanged by the capitalist for a specific quantity of money; the commodity is a *value* which is exchanged for an equivalent *value*. In other words, the living and past labor materialized in the product can exist in two distinct yet equivalent forms, in commodities and in money, or in what is common to both, *value*. This does not mean that value is labor. Value is the social *form* of reified (materialized) labor in capitalist society.

Under capitalism, social relations are not established directly; they are established through value. Everyday activity is not exchanged

directly; it is exchanged *in the form of value*. Consequently, what happens to living activity under capitalism cannot be traced by observing the activity itself, but only by following the metamorphoses of value.

When the living activity of people takes the form of *labor* (alienated activity), it acquires the property of exchangeability; it acquires the form of value. In other words, the labor can be exchanged for an “equivalent” quantity of money (wages). The deliberate alienation of living activity, which is perceived as necessary for survival by the members of capitalist society, itself reproduces the capitalist form within which alienation is necessary for survival. Because of the fact that living activity has the form of value, the products of that activity must also have the form of value: they must be exchangeable for money. This is obvious since, if the products of labor did not take the form of value, but for example the form of useful objects at the disposal of society, then they would either remain in the factory or they would be taken freely by the members of society whenever a need for them arose; in either case, the money-wages received by the workers would have no *value*, and living activity could not be *sold* for an “equivalent” quantity of money; living activity could not be alienated. Consequently, as soon as living activity takes the form of value, the products of that activity take the form of value, and the reproduction of everyday life takes place through changes or metamorphoses of value.

The capitalist sells the products of labor on a market; he exchanges them for an equivalent sum of money; he realizes a determined value. The specific magnitude of this value on a particular market is the *price* of the commodities. For the academic Economist, Price is St. Peter’s key to the gates of Heaven. Like Capital itself, Price moves within a wonderful world which consists entirely of objects. The objects have human relations with each other, and are alive. They transform each other, communicate with each other; they marry and have children. And of course it is only through the grace of these intelligent, powerful and creative objects that people can be so happy in capitalist society.

In the Economist’s pictorial representations of the workings of heaven, the angels do everything and men do nothing at all; men simply enjoy what these superior beings do for them. Not only does Capital

produce and money work; other mysterious beings have similar virtues. Thus Supply, a quantity of things which are sold, and Demand, a quantity of things which are bought, together determine Price, a quantity of money; when Supply and Demand marry on a particular point of the diagram, they give birth to Equilibrium Price, which corresponds to a universal state of bliss. The activities of everyday life are played out by things, and people are reduced to things ("factors of production") during their productive hours, and to passive spectators of things during their "leisure time." The virtue of the Economic Scientist consists of his ability to attribute the outcome of people's everyday activities to things, and of his inability to see the living activity of people underneath the antics of the things. For the Economist, the things *through* which the activity of people is regulated under capitalism are themselves the mothers and sons, the causes and consequences of their own activity.

The magnitude of value, namely the price of a commodity, the quantity of money for which it exchanges, is not determined by things, but by the daily activities of people. Supply and demand, perfect and imperfect competition, are nothing more than social forms of products and activities in capitalist society; they have no life of their own. The fact that activity is alienated, namely that labor-time is sold for a specific sum of money, that it has a certain value, has several consequences for the magnitude of the value of the products of that labor. The value of the sold commodities must *at least* be equal to the value of the labor-time. This is obvious both from the standpoint of the individual capitalist firm, and from the standpoint of society as a whole. If the value of the commodities sold by the individual capitalist were smaller than the value of the labor he hired, then his labor expenditures alone would be larger than his earnings, and he would quickly go bankrupt. Socially, if the value of the laborers' production were smaller than the value of their consumption, then the labor force could not even reproduce itself, not to speak of a class of capitalists. However, if the value of the commodities were merely equal to the value of the labor-time expended on them, the commodity producers would merely reproduce themselves, and their society would not be a capitalist society; their activity



might still consist of commodity production, but it would not be capitalist commodity production.

For labor to create Capital, the value of the products of labor must be larger than the value of the labor. In other words, the labor force must produce a *surplus product*, a quantity of goods which it does not consume, and this surplus product must be transformed into *surplus value*, a form of value which is not appropriated by workers as wages, but by capitalists as profit. Furthermore, the value of the products of labor must be larger still, since living labor is not the only kind of labor materialized in them. In the production process, workers expend their own energy, but they also use up the stored labor of others as instruments, and they shape materials on which labor was previously expended.

This leads to the strange result that the value of the laborer's products and the value of his wage are different magnitudes, namely that the sum of money received by the capitalist when he sells the commodities produced by his hired laborers is different from the sum he pays the laborers. This difference is not explained by the fact that the used-up materials and tools must be paid for. If the value of the sold commodities were equal to the value of the living labor and the instruments, there would still be no room for capitalists. The fact is that the difference between the two magnitudes must be large enough to support a class of capitalists – not only the individuals, but also the specific activity that these individuals engage in, namely the purchase of labor. The difference between the total value of the products and the value of the labor spent on their production is surplus value, the seed of Capital.

In order to locate the origin of surplus value, it is necessary to examine why the value of the labor is smaller than the value of the commodities produced by it. The alienated activity of the worker transforms materials with the aid of instruments, and produces a certain quantity of commodities. However, when these commodities are sold and the used-up materials and instruments are paid for, the workers are not given the remaining value of their products as their wages; they are given less. In other words, during every working day, the workers perform a certain quantity of unpaid labor, *forced labor*, for which they receive no equivalent.

The performance of this unpaid labor, this forced labor, is another “condition for survival” in capitalist society. However, like alienation, this condition is not imposed by nature, but by the collective practice of people, by their everyday activities. Before the existence of unions, an individual worker accepted whatever forced labor was available, since rejection of the labor would have meant that other workers would accept the available terms of exchange, and the individual worker would receive no wage. Workers competed with each other for the wages offered by capitalists; if a worker quit because the wage was unacceptably low, an unemployed worker was willing to replace him, since for the unemployed a small wage is higher than no wage at all. This competition among workers was called “free labor” by capitalists, who made great sacrifices to maintain the freedom of workers, since it was precisely this freedom that preserved the surplus value of the capitalist and made it possible for him to accumulate Capital. It was not any worker’s aim to produce more goods than he was paid for. His aim was to get a wage which was as large as possible. However, the existence of workers who got no wage at all, and whose conception of a large wage was consequently more modest than that of an employed worker, made it possible for the capitalist to hire labor at a lower wage. In fact, the existence of unemployed workers made it possible for the capitalist to pay the lowest wage that workers were willing to work for. Thus the result of the collective daily activity of the workers, each striving individually for the largest possible wage, was to lower the wages of all; the effect of the competition of each against all was that all got the smallest possible wage, and the capitalist got the largest possible surplus.

The daily practice of all annuls the goals of each. But the workers did not know that their situation was a product of their own daily behavior; their own activities were not transparent to them. To the workers it seemed that low wages were simply a natural part of life, like illness and death, and that falling wages were a natural catastrophe, like a flood or a hard winter. The critiques of socialists and the analyses of Marx, as well as an increase in industrial development which afforded more time for reflection, stripped away some of the veils and made it possible for workers to see through their activities to some extent. However in Western Europe and the United States, workers did not get rid of the

capitalist form of daily life; they formed unions. And in the different material conditions of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, workers (and peasants) replaced the capitalist class with a state bureaucracy that purchases alienated labor and accumulates Capital in the name of Marx.

With unions, daily life is similar to what it was before unions. In fact, it is almost the same. Daily life continues to consist of labor, of alienated activity, and of unpaid labor, or forced labor. The unionized worker no longer settles the terms of his alienation; union functionaries do this for him. The terms on which the worker's activity is alienated are no longer guided by the individual worker's need to accept what is available; they are now guided by the union bureaucrat's need to maintain his position as pimp between the sellers of labor and the buyers.

With or without unions, surplus value is neither a product of nature nor of Capital; it is created by the daily activities of people. In the performance of their daily activities, people are not only disposed to alienate these activities, they are also disposed to reproduce the conditions which force them to alienate their activities, to reproduce Capital and thus the power of Capital to purchase labor. This is not because they do not know "what the alternative is." A person who is incapacitated by chronic indigestion because he eats too much grease does not continue eating grease because he does not know what the alternative is. Either he prefers being incapacitated to giving up grease, or else it is not clear to him that his daily consumption of grease causes his incapacity. And if his doctor, preacher, teacher and politician tell him, first, that the grease is what keeps him alive, and secondly that they already do for him everything he would do if he were well, then it is not surprising that his activity is not transparent to him and that he makes no great effort to render it transparent.

The production of surplus value is a condition of survival, not for the population, but for the capitalist system. Surplus value is the portion of the value of commodities produced by labor which is not returned to the laborers. It can be expressed either in commodities or in money (just as Capital can be expressed either as a quantity of things or of money), but this does not alter the fact that it is an expression for the materialized labor which is stored in a given quantity of products. Since

the products can be exchanged for an “equivalent” quantity of money, the money “stands for,” or represents, the same value as the products. The money can, in turn, be exchanged for another quantity of products of “equivalent” value. The ensemble of these exchanges, which take place simultaneously during the performance of capitalist daily life, constitutes the capitalist process of circulation. It is through this process that the metamorphosis of surplus value into Capital takes place.

The portion of value which does not return to labor, namely surplus value, allows the capitalist to exist, and it also allows him to do much more than simply exist. The capitalist invests a portion of this surplus value; he hires new workers and buys new means of production; he expands his dominion. What this means is that the capitalist *accumulates new labor*, both in the form of the living labor he hires and of the past labor (paid and unpaid) which is stored in the materials and machines he buys.

The capitalist class as a whole accumulates the surplus labor of society, but this process takes place on a social scale and consequently cannot be seen if one observes only the activities of an individual capitalist. It must be remembered that the products bought by a given capitalist as instruments have the same characteristics as the products he sells. A first capitalist sells instruments to a second capitalist for a given sum of value, and only a part of this value is returned to workers as wages; the remaining part is surplus value, with which the first capitalist buys new instruments and labor. The second capitalist buys the instruments for the given value, which means that he pays for the total quantity of labor rendered to the first capitalist, the quantity of labor which was remunerated as well as the quantity performed free of charge. This means that the instruments accumulated by the second capitalist contain the unpaid labor performed for the first. The second capitalist, in turn, sells his products for a given value, and returns only a portion of this value to his laborers; he uses the remainder for new instruments and labor.

If the whole process were squeezed into a single time period, and if all the capitalists were aggregated into one, it would be seen that the value with which the capitalist acquires new instruments and labor is

equal to the value of the products which he did not return to the producers. This accumulated surplus labor is *Capital*.

In terms of capitalist society as a whole, the total Capital is equal to the sum of unpaid labor performed by generations of human beings whose lives consisted of the daily alienation of their living activity. In other words Capital, in the face of which men sell their living days, is the product of the sold activity of men, and is reproduced and expanded every day a man sells another working day, every moment he decides to continue living the capitalist form of daily life.

### **Storage and Accumulation of Human Activity**

The transformation of surplus labor into Capital is a specific historical form of a more general process, the process of industrialization, the permanent transformation of man's material environment.

Certain essential characteristics of this consequence of human activity under capitalism can be grasped by means of a simplified illustration. In an imaginary society, people spend most of their active time producing food and other necessities; only part of their time is "surplus time" in the sense that it is exempted from the production of necessities. This surplus activity may be devoted to the production of food for priests and warriors who do not themselves produce; it may be used to produce goods which are burned for sacred occasions; it may be used up in the performance of ceremonies or gymnastic exercises. In any of these cases, the material conditions of these people are not likely to change, from one generation to another, as a result of their daily activities. However, one generation of people of this imaginary society may store their surplus time instead of using it up. For example, they may spend this surplus time winding up springs. The next generation may unwind the energy stored in the springs to perform necessary tasks, or may simply use the energy of the springs to wind new springs. In either case, the stored surplus labor of the earlier generation will provide the new generation with a larger quantity of surplus working time. The new generation may also store this surplus in springs and in other receptacles. In a relatively short period, the labor stored in the springs will exceed the labor time available to any living generation; with the expenditure of relatively little energy, the people of this imaginary society will

be able to harness the springs to most of their necessary tasks, and also to the task of winding new springs for coming generations. Most of the living hours which they previously spent producing necessities will now be available for activities which are not dictated by necessity but projected by the imagination.

At first glance it seems unlikely that people would devote living hours to the bizarre task of winding springs. It seems just as unlikely, even if they wound the springs, that they would store them for future generations, since the unwinding of the springs might provide, for example, a marvelous spectacle on festive days.

However, if people did not dispose of their own lives, if their working activity were not their own, if their practical activity consisted of *forced labor*, then human activity might well be harnessed to the task of winding springs, the task of storing surplus working time in material receptacles. The historical role of Capitalism, a role which was performed by people who accepted the legitimacy of others to dispose of their lives, consisted precisely of storing human activity in material receptacles by means of forced labor.

As soon as people submit to the “power” of money to buy stored labor as well as living activity, as soon as they accept the fictional “right” of money-holders to control and dispose of the stored as well as the living activity of society, they transform money into Capital and the owners of money into Capitalists.

This double alienation, the alienation of living activity in the form of wage labor, and the alienation of the activity of past generations in the form of stored labor (means of production), is not a single act which took place sometime in history. The relation between workers and capitalists is not a thing which imposed itself on society at some point in the past, once and for all. At no time did men sign a contract, or even make a verbal agreement, in which they gave up the power over their living activity, and in which they gave up the power over the living activity of all future generations on all parts of the globe.

Capital wears the mask of a natural force; it seems as solid as the earth itself; its movements appear as irreversible as tides; its crises seem as unavoidable as earthquakes and floods. Even when it is admitted that the power of Capital is created by men, this admission may merely be

the occasion for the invention of an even more imposing mask, the mask of a man-made force, a Frankenstein monster, whose power inspires more awe than that of any natural force.

However, Capital is neither a natural force nor a man-made monster which was created sometime in the past and which dominated human life ever since. The power of Capital does not reside in money, since money is a social convention which has no more "power" than men are willing to grant it; when men refuse to sell their labor, money cannot perform even the simplest tasks, because money does not "work."

Nor does the power of Capital reside in the material receptacles in which the labor of past generations is stored, since the potential energy stored in these receptacles can be liberated by the activity of living people whether or not the receptacles are Capital, namely alien "property." Without living activity, the collection of objects which constitute society's Capital would merely be a scattered heap of assorted artifacts with no life of their own, and the "owners" of Capital would merely be a scattered assortment of uncommonly uncreative people (by training) who surround themselves with bits of paper in a vain attempt to resuscitate memories of past grandeur. The only "power" of Capital resides in the daily activities of living people. This "power" consists of the disposition of people to sell their daily activities in exchange for money, and to give up control over the products of their own activity and of the activity of earlier generations.

As soon as a person sells his labor to a capitalist and accepts only a part of his product as payment for that labor, he creates conditions for the purchase and exploitation of other people. No man would willingly give his arm or his child in exchange for money; yet when a man deliberately and consciously sells his working life in order to acquire the necessities for life, he not only reproduces the conditions which continue to make the sale of his life a necessity for its preservation; he also creates conditions which make the sale of life a necessity for other people. Later generations may of course refuse to sell their working lives for the same reason that he refused to sell his arm; however each failure to refuse alienated and forced labor enlarges the stock of stored labor with which Capital can buy working lives.

In order to transform surplus labor into Capital, the capitalist has to find a way to store it in material receptacles, in new means of production. And he must hire new laborers to activate the new means of production. In other words, he must enlarge his enterprise, or start a new enterprise in a different branch of production. This presupposes or requires the existence of materials that can be shaped into new saleable commodities, the existence of buyers of the new products, and the existence of people who are poor enough to be willing to sell their labor. These requirements are themselves created by capitalist activity, and capitalists recognize no limits or obstacles to their activity; the democracy of Capital demands absolute freedom. Imperialism is not merely the “last stage” of Capitalism; it is also the first.

Anything which can be transformed into a marketable good is grist for Capital’s mill, whether it lies on the capitalist’s land or on the neighbor’s, whether it lies above ground or under, boats on the sea or crawls on its floor, whether it is confined to other continents or other planets. All of humanity’s explorations of nature, from Alchemy to Physics, are mobilized to search for new materials in which to store labor, to find new objects that someone can be taught to buy.

Buyers for old and new products are created by any and all available means, and new means are constantly discovered. “Open markets” and “open doors” are established by force and fraud. If people lack the means to buy the capitalists’ products, they are hired by capitalists and are paid for producing the goods they wish to buy; if local craftsmen already produce what the capitalists have to sell, the craftsmen are ruined or bought-out; if laws or traditions ban the use of certain products, the laws and the traditions are destroyed; if people lack the objects on which to use the capitalists’ products, they are taught to buy these objects; if people run out of physical or biological wants, then capitalists “satisfy” their “spiritual wants” and hire psychologists to create them; if people are so satiated with the products of capitalists that they can no longer use new objects, they are taught to buy objects and spectacles which have no use but can simply be observed and admired.

Poor people are found in pre-agrarian and agrarian societies on every continent; if they are not poor enough to be willing to sell their labor when the capitalists arrive, they are impoverished by the activities



of the capitalists themselves. The lands of hunters gradually become the “private property” of “owners” who use state violence to restrict the hunters to “reservations” which do not contain enough food to keep them alive. The tools of peasants gradually become available only from the same merchant who generously lends them the money with which to buy the tools, until the peasants’ “debts” are so large that they are forced to sell land which neither they nor any of their ancestors had ever bought. The buyers of craftsmen’s products gradually become reduced to the merchants who market the products, until the day comes when a merchant decides to house “his craftsmen” under the same roof, and provides them with the instruments which will enable all of them to concentrate their activity on the production of the most profitable items. Independent as well as dependent hunters, peasants and craftsmen, free men as well as slaves, are transformed into hired laborers. Those who previously disposed of their own lives in the face of harsh material conditions cease to dispose of their own lives precisely when they take up the task of modifying their material conditions. Those who were previously conscious creators of their own meager existence become unconscious victims of their own activity even while abolishing the meagerness of their existence. Men who were much but had little now have much but are little.

The production of new commodities, the “opening” of new markets, the creation of new workers, are not three separate activities; they are three aspects of the same activity. A new labor force is created precisely in order to produce the new commodities. The wages received by these laborers are themselves the new market, their unpaid labor is the source of new expansion. Neither natural nor cultural barriers halt the spread of Capital, the transformation of people’s daily activity into alienated labor, the transformation of their surplus labor into the “private property” of capitalists. However, Capital is not a natural force. It is a set of activities performed by people every day. It is a form of daily life. Its continued existence and expansion presuppose only one essential condition: the disposition of people to continue to alienate their working lives and thus reproduce the capitalist form of daily life.

## Essay on Commodity Fetishism

In 1967, Perlman and his former PhD supervisor Miloš Samardžija translated I.I. Rubin's *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* from Russian, via Samardžija's Serbo-Croatian, into English. This essay, written by Perlman the following year, served as an introduction to the English version of Rubin's book when it was published in 1971.

According to economists whose theories currently prevail in America, economics has replaced political economy, and economics deals with scarcity, prices, and resource allocation. In the definition of Paul Samuelson, "economics or political economy, as it used to be called, is the study of how men and society *choose*, with or without the use of money, to employ *scarce* productive resources, which could have alternative uses, to produce various commodities over time and distribute them for consumption, now and in the future, among various people and groups in society."<sup>1</sup> According to Robert Campbell, "One of the central preoccupations of economics has always been what determines price."<sup>2</sup> In the words of another expert, "Any community, the primers tell us, has to deal with a pervasive economic problem: how to determine the uses of available resources, including not only goods and services that can be employed productively but also other scarce supplies."<sup>3</sup>

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1 Paul A. Samuelson, *Economics, An Introductory Analysis*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1967, Seventh Edition, p.1 and p.5 (Italics by Samuelson). Samuelson's book is the prototype of the textbook currently used in American universities to teach students the principles of economics.

2 Robert W. Campbell, "Marx, Kantorovich and Novozhilov: Stoimost versus Reality", *Slavic Review*, October, 1961, pp.402-418. Reprinted in Wayne A. Leeman, ed., *Capitalism, Market Socialism and Central Planning*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963, pp. 102-118, and also in Harry G. Shaffer, *The Soviet Economy*, New York: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1963, pp.350-366. Campbell is currently an American Authority on Marxian Economics.

3 Abram Bergson, *The Economics of Soviet Planning*, New Haven: Yale University

If economics is indeed merely a new name for political economy, and if the subject matter which was once covered under the heading of political economy is now covered by economics, then economics has replaced political economy. However, if the subject matter of political economy is not the same as that of economics, then the “replacement” of political economy is actually an omission of a field of knowledge. If economics answers different questions from those raised by political economy, and if the omitted questions refer to the form and the quality of human life within the dominant social-economic system, then this omission can be called a “great evasion”.<sup>4</sup>

The Soviet economic theorist and historian I.I. Rubin suggested a definition of political economy which has nothing in common with the definitions of economics quoted above. According to Rubin, “Political economy deals with human working activity, not from the standpoint of its technical methods and instruments of labor, but from the standpoint of its social form. It deals with *production relations* which are established among people in the process of production.”<sup>5</sup> In terms of this definition, political economy is not the study of prices or of scarce resources; it is a study of social relations, a study of culture. Political economy asks why the productive forces of society develop within a particular social form, why the machine process unfolds within the context of business enterprise, why industrialization takes the form of capitalist development. Political economy asks how the working activity of people is regulated in a specific, historical form of economy.

The contemporary American definitions of economics quoted earlier clearly deal with different problems, raise different questions, and refer to a different subject matter from that of political economy as defined

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Press, 1964, p.3. Bergson is director of the Russian Research Center at Harvard University and, like Campbell, he is currently an Authority on Marxian Economics.

4 After the title of William Appleman Williams’ *The Great Evasion*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964. Williams vividly describes some of the techniques of the evasion: “The tactics of escape employed in this headlong dash from reality would fill a manual of equivocation, a handbook of hairsplitting, and a guidebook to changing the subject.” (p.18).

5 I. I. Rubin, *Ocherki po teorii stoimosti Marksa*, Moakva: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1928, p.41; present translation, p.31. Rubin’s book was not re-issued in the Soviet Union after 1928, and it has never before been translated. Future page citations in this *Introduction* refer to the present translation.

by Rubin. This means one of two things: (a) either economics and political economy are two different branches of knowledge, in which case the “replacement” of political economy by economics simply means that the American practitioners of one branch have replaced the other branch, or (b) economics is indeed the new name for what “used to be called” political economy; in this case, by defining economics as a study of scarcity, prices, and resource allocation, American economists are saying that the production relations among people are not a legitimate subject for study. In this case the economists quoted above are setting themselves up as the legislators over what is, and what is not, a legitimate topic for intellectual concern; they are defining the limits of American knowledge. This type of intellectual legislation has led to predictable consequences in other societies and at other times: it has led to total ignorance in the excluded field of knowledge, and it has led to large gaps and blind spots in related fields of knowledge.

A justification for the omission of political economy from American knowledge has been given by Samuelson. In the balanced, objective language of an American professor, Samuelson says: “A billion people, one-third of the world’s population, blindly regard *Das Kapital* as economic gospel. And yet, without the disciplined study of economic science, how can anyone form a reasoned opinion about the merits or lack of merits in the classical, traditional economics?”<sup>6</sup> If “a billion people” regard *Das Kapital* “as economic gospel” it is clearly relevant to ask why only a few million Americans regard Samuelson’s *Economics* “as economic gospel”. Perhaps a balanced objective answer might be that “a billion people” find little that is relevant or meaningful in Samuelson’s celebrations of American capitalism and his exercises in two-dimensional geometry, whereas the few million Americans have no choice but to learn the “merits in the classical, traditional economics”. Samuelson’s rhetorical question – “And yet, without the disciplined study of economic science, how can anyone form a reasoned opinion about the merits” – is clearly a two-edged sword, since it can be asked about any major economic theory, not merely Samuelson’s: and it clearly behooves the student to draw his own conclusion and make his

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6 Samuelson, *op. cit.*, p.1.

own choice after a “disciplined study” of all the major economic theories, not merely Samuelson’s.

Although Samuelson, in his introductory textbook, devotes a great deal of attention to Marx, this essay will show that Samuelson’s treatment hardly amounts to a “disciplined study” of Marx’s political economy.

The present essay will outline some of the central themes of Marx’s political economy, particularly the themes which are treated in Rubin’s *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value*. Rubin’s book is a comprehensive, tightly argued exposition of the core of Marx’s work, the theory of commodity fetishism and the theory of value. Rubin clarifies misconceptions which have resulted, and still result, from superficial readings and evasive treatments of Marx’s work.

Marx’s principal aim was not to study scarcity, or to explain price, or to allocate resources, but to analyze how the working activity of people is regulated in a capitalist economy. The subject of the analysis is a determined social structure, a particular culture, namely commodity-capitalism, a social form of economy in which the relations among people are not regulated directly, but through things. Consequently, “the specific character of economic theory as a science which deals with the commodity capitalist economy lies precisely in the fact that it deals with production relations which acquire material forms.” (Rubin, p.47).

Marx’s central concern was human creative activity, particularly the determinants, the regulators which shape this activity in the capitalist form of economy. Rubin’s thorough study makes it clear that this was not merely the central concern of the “young Marx” or of the “old Marx”, but that it remained central to Marx in all his theoretical and historical works, which extend over half a century. Rubin shows that this theme gives the unity of a single work to fifty years of research and writing, that this theme is the content of the labor theory of value, and thus that Marx’s economic theory can be understood only within the framework of this central theme. Marx’s vast *opus* is not a series of disconnected episodes, each with specific problems which are later abandoned. Consequently, the frequently drawn contrast between an “idealistic young Marx” concerned with the philosophical problems of human existence, and a “realistic old Marx” concerned with technical

economic problems,<sup>7</sup> is superficial and misses the essential unity of Marx's entire *opus*. Rubin shows that the central themes of the "young Marx" were being still further refined in the final pages of Marx's last published work; Marx continually sharpened his concepts and frequently changed his terminology, but his concerns were not replaced. Rubin demonstrates this by tracing the central themes of works which Marx wrote in the early 1840's through the third volume of *Capital*, published by Engels in 1894.

In the different periods of his productive life, Marx expressed his concern with human creativity through different, though related, concepts. In his early works, Marx unified his ideas around the concept of "alienation" or "estrangement". Later, when Marx refined his ideas of "reified" or "congealed" labor, the theory of commodity fetishism provided a focus, a unifying framework for his analysis. In Marx's later work, the theory of commodity fetishism, namely the theory of a society in which relations among people take the form of relations among things, the theory of a society in which production relations are reified, becomes Marx's "general theory of production relations of the commodity-capitalist economy". (Rubin, p. 3). Thus Marx's theory of value, the most frequently criticized part of his political economy, can only be understood within the context of the theory of commodity fetishism, or in Rubin's words, the "ground of Marx's theory of value can only be given on the basis of his theory of commodity fetishism, which analyzes the general structure of the commodity economy". (p.61)

This essay will examine the relationship between the concept of alienation, the theory of commodity fetishism and the theory of value, and it will be shown that the three formulations are approaches to the same problem: the determination of the creative activity of people in the capitalist form of economy. This examination will show that Marx

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7 For example: "Curiously enough, it was the very young Marx (writing in the early 1840's) who developed ideas very much in the mood of other systems of thought that have such great appeal to the mentality of the 1950's and 1960's: psychoanalysis, existentialism, and Zen Buddhism. And contrariwise, the work of the mature Marx, which stressed economic and political analysis, has been less compelling to intellectuals of the advanced Western nations since the end of World War II." Robert Blamer, *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 1.

had no interest per se in defining a standard of value, in developing a theory of price isolated from a historically specific mode of production, or in the efficient allocation of resources. Marx's work is a critical analysis of how people are regulated in the capitalist economy; it is not a handbook on how to regulate people and things. The subtitle of Marx's three volume *Capital* is "Critique of Political Economy", and not "Manual for Efficient Management". This does not mean that Marx did not consider problems of resource allocation important; it means that he did not consider them the central concern of political economy, a science of social relations.

Marx's first approach to the analysis of social relations in capitalist society was through the concept of alienation, or estrangement. Although he adopted the concept from Hegel, already in his earliest works Marx was critical of the content which Hegel gave to the concept. "For Hegel the *essence of man – man – equals self-consciousness*. All estrangement of the human essence is therefore *nothing but estrangement of self-consciousness*."<sup>8</sup> For Marx in 1844, Hegel's treatment of consciousness as man's essence is "a hidden and mystifying criticism", but Marx observes that "inasmuch as it grasps steadily man's estrangement, even though man appears only in the shape of mind, there lie concealed in it all the elements of criticism, already *prepared and elaborated* in a manner often rising far above the Hegelian standpoint."<sup>9</sup> Thus Marx adopts the concept of "estrangement" as a powerful tool for analysis, even though he does not agree with Hegel about what is estranged, namely he does not agree that thinking is the essence of man. For Marx in 1844, man's essence is larger than thought, larger than self-consciousness; it is man's creative activity, his labor, in all its aspects. Marx considers consciousness to be only one aspect of man's creative activity. Thus, while he concedes that Hegel "grasps *labor* as the *essence* of man," he points out that "The only labor which Hegel knows and recognizes is *abstractly mental* labor".<sup>10</sup> But Hegel does not only define self-consciousness as man's essence; he then proceeds to accommodate himself to alienated, externalized modes of consciousness, namely to

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8 Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, New York: International Publishers, 1964, p.178.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 176. (Italics in original.)

10 *Ibid.*, p.177.

religion, philosophy and state power; Hegel “confirms this in its alienated shape and passes it off as his true mode of being reestablishes it, and pretends to be *at home in his other-being as such*. Thus, for instance, after annulling and superseding religion, after recognizing religion to be a product of self-alienation, he yet finds confirmation of himself in religion as religion. Here is the root of Hegel’s *false* positivism, or of his merely *apparent* criticism.”<sup>11</sup> However for Marx “There can therefore no longer be any question about an act of accommodation” and he explains, “If I *know* religion as *alienated* human self-consciousness, then what I know in it as religion is not my self-consciousness, but my alienated self-consciousness . . .”<sup>12</sup> In other words, even though Hegel formulated the concept of alienation, he was yet able to accommodate himself to religion and state power, namely to alienated forms of existence which negate man’s essence even in Hegel’s definition (as consciousness).

Thus Marx set himself two tasks: to reshape the concept of alienation, and to redefine man’s essence. For this purpose Marx turned to Feuerbach, who completed the first task for him, and who went a long way in providing a provisional solution to the second. The solution to both tasks could be approached if practical, creative activity and the working relations of people with each other, were made the center, the focal point of theory. Only then would it be possible to see that religion, and philosophy as well, are not forms of realization but rather forms of alienation of man’s essence. Marx acknowledged his debt: “Feuerbach’s great achievement is: (1) The proof that philosophy is nothing else but religion rendered into thought and expounded by thought, hence equally to be condemned as another form and manner of existence of the estrangement of the essence of man; (2) The establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*, since Feuerbach also makes the social relationship ‘of man to man’ the basic principle of the theory . . .”<sup>13</sup>

Marx acknowledged Feuerbach’s role in reshaping the concept of alienation, namely in grasping religion and philosophy as alienations of the essence of man. However, a year later, in his *Theses on Feuerbach* of

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11 *Ibid.*, p. 184.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 172.



1845, Marx expresses dissatisfaction with Feuerbach's grasp of the human essence. "Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man", but for Feuerbach the essence of man remains something isolated, unhistorical, and therefore abstract. For Marx, "the essence of man is not an abstraction inherent in each particular individual. The real nature of man is the totality of social relations."<sup>14</sup> Marx generalizes his dissatisfaction with Feuerbach: "The chief defect of all previous materialism (including that of Feuerbach) is that things, reality, the sensible world, are conceived only in the form of *objects of observation*, but not as *human sense activity*, not as *practical activity* . . ."<sup>15</sup> Marx makes this charge more specific in a later work, where he says that Feuerbach "still remains in the realm of theory and conceives of men not in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them what they are", and therefore "he never arrives at the really existing active men, but stops at the abstraction 'man' . . . he knows no other 'human relationships' 'of man to man' than love and friendship, and even then idealized. Thus he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous *activity* of the individuals composing it."<sup>16</sup>

Marx is able to reject Feuerbach's definition of man as an abstraction because, already in an early essay on "Free Human Production", Marx had started to view man in far more concrete terms, namely he had already started to view the world of objects as a world of practical human activity, creative activity. In this early essay, written in 1844, Marx's conception of man is still unhistorical; he did not explicitly reject this unhistorical view until he wrote *The German Ideology* with Engels in 1845–46 and the *Poverty of Philosophy* in 1847. However, this early essay already brings human creative activity into focus, and thus it also points to the "essence" which is alienated in capitalist society. Marx asks the reader to imagine human beings outside of capitalist society, namely outside of history: "Suppose we had produced things as human

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14 Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in T.B. Bottomore and Maximillien Rubel, editors *Karl Marx, Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1964, p.68.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

16 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, pp.58–59.

beings: in his production each of us would have twice affirmed himself and the other. (1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality* and its particularity, and in the course of the activity I would have enjoyed an individual *life*; in viewing the object I would have experienced the individual joy of knowing my personality as an *objective, sensuously perceptible, and indubitable* power. (2) In your satisfaction and your use of my product I would have had the direct and conscious satisfaction that my work satisfied a *human* need, that it objectified *human* nature, and that it created an object appropriate to the need of another *human* being . . . Our productions would be so many mirrors reflecting our nature . . . My labor would be a *free manifestation of life* and an *enjoyment of life*.”<sup>17</sup> It is precisely this labor, this free production, this free manifestation and enjoyment of life, which is alienated in capitalist society: “Under the presupposition of private property my labor is an *externalization of life* because I *work in order to live* and provide for myself the means of living. Working is not living.” At this point Marx vividly contrasts the idea of free, unalienated labor, with the alienated wage-labor – he calls it forced labor – of capitalist society: “Under the presupposition of private property my individuality is externalized to the point where I *hate* this *activity* and where it is a *torment* for me. Rather it is then only the *semblance* of an activity, only a *forced* activity, imposed upon me only by *external* and accidental necessity and *not* by an *internal* and *determined* necessity . . . My labor, therefore, is manifested as the objective, sensuous, perceptible, and indubitable expression of my *self-loss* and my *powerlessness*.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus Marx is led to a contrast between an unalienated, ideal, unhistorical man, and the alienated man of capitalist society. From here, we might follow Rubin and show the relationship of this contrast between the ideal and the actual to the later contrast between productive forces and relations of production. The later contrast becomes the basis for Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, and thus for his theory of value. However, before returning to Rubin’s exposition, we will digress slightly to examine two types of interpretation which have recently

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17 From “Excerpt-Notes of 1844” in *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, translated and edited by Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967, p.281. (Italics in original)

18 *Ibid.*, p.281–282.

been made of Marx's early works. One holds that Marx's theory of alienation can be accepted and applied without his critique of capitalism, and the other holds that the writings of 1844 contain the quintessence of Marx's thought and that the later works are merely reformulations of the same insights.

The sociologist Robert Blauner reduces alienation to "a quality of personal experience which results from specific kinds of social arrangements."<sup>19</sup> On the basis of this reduction Blauner says that "Today, most social scientists would say that alienation is not a consequence of capitalism per se but of employment in the large-scale organizations and impersonal bureaucracies that pervade all industrial societies."<sup>20</sup> In other words, Blauner defines alienation as a psychological, personal experience, as something which the worker feels, and which is consequently in the mind of the worker and is not a structural feature of capitalist society. For Blauner to say that alienation so defined "is not a consequence of capitalism" is then a tautology. It is Blauner's very definition which makes it possible for him to treat alienation as a consequence of industry (namely the productive forces) and not as a consequence of capitalism (namely the social relations).

However, regardless of what "most social scientists would say," in Marx's work alienation is related to the structure of capitalist society, and not to the personal experience of the worker. It is the very nature of wage-labor, the basic social relation of capitalist society, which accounts for alienation: "The following elements are contained in *wage-labor*: (1) the chance relationship and alienation of labor from the laboring subject; (2) the chance relationship and alienation of labor from its object; (3) the determination of the laborer through social needs which are an alien compulsion to him, a compulsion to which he submits out of egoistic need and distress these social needs are merely a source of providing the necessities of life for him, just as he is merely a slave for them; (4) the maintenance of his individual existence appears to the worker as the goal of his activity and his real action is only a means; he lives to acquire the means of living."<sup>21</sup> In fact, Marx very explicitly

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19 Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and his Industry*, p. 15.

20 *Ibid.*, p.3

21 From "Excerpt-Notes of 1844," *loc. cit.*, p. 275-276.

located alienation at the very root of capitalist society: "To say that *man* alienates himself is the same as saying that the *society* of this alienated man is the caricature of his *actual common life*, of his true generic life. His activity, therefore, appears as torment, his own creation as a force alien to him, his wealth as poverty, the *essential bond* connecting him with other men as something unessential so that the separation from other men appears as his true existence." Marx adds that this capitalist society, this caricature of a human community, is the only form of society which capitalist economists are able to imagine: "Society, says Adam Smith, is a *commercial enterprise*. Each of its members is a *merchant*. It is evident that political economy *establishes* an *alienated* form of social intercourse as the *essential*, original, and definitive human form."<sup>22</sup>

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx applies Feuerbach's concept of man's alienation of himself in religion, to man's alienation of himself in the product of his labor. The following passage comes very close to describing the world of commodities as a world of fetishes which regulate and dominate human life: "The more the worker expends himself in his work, the more powerful becomes the world of objects which he creates in face of himself, and the poorer he himself becomes in his inner life, the less he belongs to himself. It is just the same as in religion. The more of himself man attributes to God, the less he has left in himself. The worker puts his life into the object, and his life then belongs no longer to him but to the object. The greater his activity, therefore, the less he possesses . . . The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, independently and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force."<sup>23</sup> In the same work, Marx comes very close to defining the product of labor as congealed labor, or reified labor, a formulation which is to reappear more than twenty years later in his theory of commodity fetishism: "The object produced by labour, its product, now stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a *power indepen-*

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.272.

<sup>23</sup> Bottomore and Rubel, eds., *op. cit.*, p.170.

dent of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been embodied in an object, and turned into a physical thing; this product is an *objectification* of labour.” The labor which is lost by the worker is appropriated by the capitalist: “. . . the alienated character of work for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person.”<sup>24</sup> The result of this alienation of the worker’s creative power is vividly described by Marx in a passage that summarizes the qualitative aspect of his theory of exploitation: “The less you *are*, the less you express your own life, the greater is your *alienated* life, the more you *have*, the greater is the store of your estranged being. Everything which the political economist takes from you in life and in humanity, he replaces for you in *money* and in *wealth* . . .”<sup>25</sup> The producer alienates his creative power, in fact he sells it to the capitalist, and what he gets in exchange is different in kind from that creative power; in exchange for the creative power he gets things, and the less he is, as a creative human being, the more things he has.

These formulations make it clear that, for Marx, alienation is inherent in the social relations of capitalist society, a society in which one class appropriates the labor which another class alienates; for Marx, wage-labor is, by definition, alienated labor. In terms of this definition of alienated labor, the statement that “alienation is not a consequence of capitalism” is meaningless.

The Yugoslav philosopher Veljko Korać has presented the theory of alienation formulated by Marx in 1844 as the final form of Marx’s theory and Korać summarized this theory as follows: “Establishing through critical analysis man’s alienation from man, from the product of his labor, even from his own human activity, Marx raised the question of abolishing all these forms of dehumanization, and the possibility of restoring *human* society.”<sup>26</sup> In 1844 Marx did indeed speak of “rehabilitating” (if not exactly of “restoring”) “human society”: “Communism . . . is hence the actual phase necessary for the next stage of histor-

24 *Ibid.*, p.171 and 170.

25 Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* New York: International Publishers, 1964, p.150.

26 Veljko Korać , “In Search of Human Society,” in Erich Fromm, editor, *Socialist Humanism*, Garden City: Anchor Books, 1966, p.6. (Italics in original.)

ical development in the process of human emancipation and rehabilitation. Communism is the necessary pattern and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development – which goal is the structure of human society.”<sup>27</sup> In some passages of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx even spoke of communism as a return of human nature: “Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus, the real appropriation of human nature, through and for man. It is therefore the return of man himself as a social, that is, really human, being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development. Communism as a complete naturalism is humanism, and as a complete humanism is naturalism . . . The positive abolition of private property, as the appropriation of human life, is thus the positive abolition of all alienation, and thus the return of man from religion, the family, the State, etc., to his human, i.e., social life.”<sup>28</sup> In 1844, Marx had also defined the agent, the social class, which would carry through this reappropriation of man’s creative power, this return of man’s human essence; it would be “a class with *radical chains*, a class in civil society that is not of civil society, a class that is the dissolution of all classes, a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering and claiming no *particular right* because no *particular wrong* but *unqualified wrong* is perpetrated on it; a sphere that can invoke no *traditional* title but only a *human* title . . .”<sup>29</sup> Marx even described some of the social relations of an unalienated, human society: “Assume *man* to be *man* and his relationship to the world to be a human one: then you can exchange love only for love, trust for trust, etc. If you want to enjoy art, you must be an artistically cultivated person . . .”<sup>30</sup>

Thus there is no doubt that in 1844, Marx spoke of a human society and a human essence which could be rehabilitated, returned, or restored. However, powerful and suggestive though these passages are, they cannot be viewed as the final formulation of Marx’s social and

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27 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 146.

28 Bottomore and Rubel, eds., *op. cit.*, pp.243–244

29 Easton and Guddat, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, pp.262–263.

30 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 169.

economic theory, nor can Marx's later works be treated as mere re-statements of the same ideas. Erich Fromm is aware of this when he writes: "In his earlier writings Marx still called 'human nature in general' the 'essence of man.' He later gave up this term because he wanted to make it clear that the essence of man is no *abstraction* . . . Marx also wanted to avoid giving the impression that he thought of the essence of man as an unhistorical substance."<sup>31</sup> Fromm is also aware that Marx's concept of alienation, "although not the word, remains of central significance throughout his whole later main work, including *The Capital*."<sup>32</sup> Fromm does not, however, examine the stages which led from the concept of alienation to the theory of commodity fetishism, and in Fromm's own philosophical framework, the central problem is "to cease being asleep and to become human". For Fromm this involves primarily changing one's ideas and one's methods of thinking: "I believe that one of the most disastrous mistakes in individual and social life consists in being caught in stereotyped alternatives of thinking . . . I believe that man must get rid of illusions that enslave and paralyze him, that he must become aware of the reality inside and outside of him in order to create a world which needs no illusions. Freedom and independence can be achieved only when the chains of illusion are broken."<sup>33</sup>

In the Preface to *The German Ideology*, Marx ridicules would-be revolutionaries who want to free men from stereotyped alternatives of thinking, from the illusions that enslave and paralyze men. Marx has these revolutionaries announce: "Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away. Let us revolt against the rule of thoughts. Let us teach men, says one, to exchange these Imaginations for thoughts which correspond to the essence of man; says the second, to take up a critical attitude to them; says the third, to knock them out of their heads; and existing reality will collapse." Then Marx draws the ridicule to its conclusion: "Once upon a time a valiant fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the

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31 Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1962, p.32.

32 *Ibid.*, p.49.

33 *Ibid.*, pp. 196–197.

*idea of gravity*. If they were to knock this notion out of their heads, say by stating it to be a superstition, a religious concept, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water.”<sup>34</sup> In a letter written at the end of 1846, Marx turned the same critique against P.J. Proudhon: “. . . in place of the practical and violent action of the masses . . . Monsieur Proudhon supplies the whimsical motion of his own head. So it is the men of learning that make history, the men who know how to purloin God’s secret thoughts. The common people have only to apply their revelations. You will now understand why M. Proudhon is the declared enemy of every political movement. The solution of present problems does not lie for him in public action but in the dialectical rotations of his own mind.”<sup>35</sup>

Between 1845 and 1847, Marx also abandons his earlier conception of a human essence or a human nature to which man can return: “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, Marx goes on to say that man’s ideas of his nature or his essence are themselves conditioned by the material conditions in which men find themselves, and therefore man’s “essence” is not something to which he can return, or even something which he can conceive in thought, since it is constantly in a process of historical change. “Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these . . . Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual-life process.” Consequently, “we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-

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34 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.23–24.

35 Letter of Marx to P.V. Annenkov. December 28, 1846, in Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, New York: International Publishers, 1963. p.191.

36 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.32.



process.”<sup>37</sup> Thus unlike the philosopher we quoted earlier, Marx no longer begins his analysis with “Marx’s concept of Man”; he begins with man in a given cultural environment. Marx systematized the relationship between technology, social relations and ideas in *The Poverty of Philosophy* in 1847: “In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production, and in changing their mode of production . . . they change all their social relations. The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steammill, society with the industrial capitalist. The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with their material productivity, produce also principles, ideas and categories, in conformity with their social relations.”<sup>38</sup> The next step is to pull man’s “essence” into history, namely to say that man has no essence apart from his historical existence, and this is precisely what Marx does when he says that the “sum of productive forces, capital funds and social forms of intercourse, which every individual and generation finds in existence as something given, is the real of what the philosophers have conceived as ‘substance’ and ‘essence of man’ . . .”<sup>39</sup>

Here Marx’s contrast between an ideal, unalienated society, and the real capitalist society, has come to an end. Man creates the material conditions in which he lives, not in terms of an ideal society which he can “restore”, but in terms of the possibilities and the limits of the productive forces which he inherits. Marx defines these historical limits and possibilities in the letter from which we quoted earlier: “. . . men are not free to choose their *productive forces* – which are the basis of all their history – for every productive force is an acquired force, the product of former activity. The productive forces are therefore the result of practical human energy; but this energy is itself conditioned by the circumstances in which men find themselves, by the productive forces already acquired, by the social form which exists before they do, which they do not create, which is the product of the preceding generation. Because of this . . . a history of humanity takes shape which is all the more a history of humanity as the productive forces of man and

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37 *Ibid.*, p.37.

38 Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, p.109.

39 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.50.

therefore his social relations have been more developed.”<sup>40</sup> “. . . People won freedom for themselves each time to the extent that was dictated and permitted not by their ideal of man, but by the existing productive forces.”<sup>41</sup>

Marx has resolved man’s essence into the historical conditions in which man exists, and thus he has been led to abandon the conflict between the alienated man of capitalist society and his unalienated human essence. However, Rubin points out that over a decade later, in 1859, the conflict reappears on a new plane, no longer in the form of a conflict between ideal and reality, but as a conflict between productive forces and social relations which are both parts of reality: “At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution.”<sup>42</sup>

Having pointed to the relations of production, namely the social relations among people in the process of production, as the framework within which man’s productive forces, his technology, develop, and as fetters which may obstruct the further development of technology, Marx now turns to a detailed characterization of the relations of production of capitalist society. And having abandoned the study of man’s essence for the study of man’s historical situation, Marx also

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40 Letter of Marx to Annenkov, *loc. cit.*, p. 181.

41 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p.475.

42 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1904, p. 12. It is interesting to note that at this point, Marx begins to develop a general theory of cultural development and cultural change, or what the anthropologist Leslie White has called a “science of culture” (See Leslie A. White, *The Science of Culture*, New York: Grove Press, 1949) The paragraph which contains the passage quoted above also contains the following, formulation: “Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must rather be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the material forces of production and the relations of production. No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society. Therefore, mankind always takes up only such problems as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.” (pp. 12–13.)

abandons the word “alienation”, since the earlier use of the word has made it an abbreviated expression for “man’s alienation from his essence”. Already in *The German Ideology*, Marx had referred sarcastically to the word “estrangement” (or alienation) as “a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers”,<sup>43</sup> implying that it was no longer an acceptable term to Marx. However, even though he abandons the word, Marx continues to develop the content which he had expressed with the word, and this further development takes Marx far beyond his early formulations, and just as far beyond the theorists who think the concept of alienation was fully developed and completed in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Rubin shows that this further development of the concept of alienation takes place precisely in the theory of commodity fetishism and the theory of value, and so I will now turn to Rubin’s exposition of these theories and will attempt to make explicit their connections with the concept of alienation.<sup>44</sup>

Rubin outlines Marx’s transition from the concept of alienation to the theory of commodity fetishism in the following terms: “In order to transfer the theory of ‘alienation’ of human relations into a theory of ‘reification’ of social relations (i.e., into the theory of commodity fetishism), Marx had to create a path from utopian to scientific socialism, from negating reality in the name of an ideal to seeking within reality itself the forces for further development and motion.” (Rubin, p.57). The link between alienation and commodity fetishism is the concept of ‘reification’ (materialization or objectification) of social relations. Rubin traces certain stages in Marx’s formulation of the concept of reification. In the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* of 1859, Marx noted that in capitalist society, where labor creates commodities, “the social relations of men appear in the reversed

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43 Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 46.

44 C. Wright Mills did not see the connection between the concept of alienation and Marx’s later work, namely the three volumes of *Capital*, and consequently Mills reduced the question of alienation to “the question of the attitude of men toward the work they do.” As a result, Mills was disappointed with Marx on this score: “to say the least, the condition in which Marx left the conception of alienation is quite incomplete, and brilliantly ambiguous.” (C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962, p. 112.)

form -a social relation of things.”<sup>45</sup> In this work, social relations among people merely “appear” to take the form of things, they merely seem to be reified. Consequently, Marx calls this reification a “mystification”, and he attributes to “the habit of everyday life”.<sup>46</sup>

However, in Volume I of *Capital*, this reification of social relations is no longer merely an appearance in the mind of the individual commodity producer and it is no longer a result of the commodity producer’s thinking habits. Here, “the materialization of production relations does not arise from ‘habits’ but from the internal structure of the commodity economy. Fetishism is not only a phenomenon of social consciousness, but of social being.” (Rubin, p.59). The cause of the fetishism, namely the cause of the fact that relations among people take the form of relations among things, is to be found in the characteristics of capitalist economy as a commodity economy: “The absence of direct regulation of the social process of production necessarily leads to the indirect regulation of the production process through the market, through the products of labor, through things.” (*Ibid.*)

Consequently, the reification of social relations and the fetishism of commodities are not “chains of illusion” which can be “broken” within the context of capitalist society, because they do not arise from “stereotyped alternatives of thinking” (Erich Fromm). The capitalist form of social production “necessarily leads” to the reification of social relations; reification is not only a “consequence” of capitalism; it is an inseparable aspect of capitalism. Concrete, unalienated labor which is a creative expression of an individual’s personality, cannot take place within the production process of capitalist society. The labor which produces commodities, namely things for sale on the market, is not concrete but abstract labor, “abstractly-general, social labor which arises from the complete alienation of individual labor” (Rubin, p. 147). In the commodity economy labor is not creative activity; it is the expenditure of labor-time, of labor-power, of homogeneous human labor, or labor in general. Nor is this the case at all times and in all places. “Only on the basis of commodity production, characterized by a wide development of exchange, a mass transfer of individuals from one activity to

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45 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 30.

46 *Ibid.*

another, and indifference of individuals towards the concrete form of labor, is it possible to develop the homogeneous character of all working operations as forms of human labor in general" (Rubin, p. 138). In capitalist society, this labor-power which produces commodities is itself a commodity: it is a thing which is bought by the capitalist from the worker, or as Paul Samuelson puts it: "A man is much more than a commodity. Yet it is true that men do rent out their services for a price."<sup>47</sup> Thus labor in capitalist society is reified labor; it is labor turned into a thing.

The reified labor of capitalist society, the abstract, homogeneous labor-power which is bought by the capitalist for a price, is crystallized, congealed in commodities which are appropriated by the capitalist and sold on the market. The laborer literally alienates, estranges his creative power, he sells it. Since creative power refers to an individual's conscious participation in the shaping of his material environment, since the power to decide is at the root of creation, it would be more accurate to say that creative power simply does not exist for the hired worker in capitalist society. It is precisely the power to shape his circumstances that the laborer sells to the capitalist; it is precisely this power which is appropriated by the capitalist, not only in the form of the homogeneous labor-time which he buys for a price, but also in the form of the abstract labor which is congealed in commodities. This reified labor, this abstract labor which is crystallized, congealed in commodities, "acquires a given social form" in capitalist society, namely the form of value. Thus Marx "makes the 'form of value' the subject of his examination, namely value as the social form of the product of labor – the form which the classical economists took for granted . . ." (Rubin, p. 112). Thus, through the theory of commodity fetishism, the concept of reified labor becomes the link between the theory of alienation in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and the theory of value in *Capital*.

Marx's explanation of the phenomenon of reification, namely of the fact that abstract labor takes the "form of value", is no longer in terms of people's habits, but in terms of the characteristics of a commodity economy. In *Capital*, Marx points out that relations among people are

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<sup>47</sup> Samuelson, *Economics*, p. 542.

realized through things, and that this is the only way they can be realized in a commodity economy: “The social connection between the working activity of individual commodity producers is realized only through the equalization of all concrete forms of labor, and this equalization is carried out in the form of an equalization of all the products of labor as values” (Rubin, p. 130). This is not only true of relations among capitalists as buyers and sellers of the products of labor, but also of relations between capitalists and workers as buyers and sellers of labor-power. It is to be noted that in the commodity economy, the laborer himself is a “free, independent” commodity producer. The commodity he produces is his labor-power; he produces this commodity by eating, sleeping and procreating. In David Ricardo’s language, the “natural price of labour” is that price which enables laborers “to subsist and perpetuate their race”,<sup>48</sup> namely to reproduce their labor-power. The worker sells his commodity on the labor market in the form of value, and in exchange for a given amount of his commodity, labor-power, he receives a given sum of value, namely money, which he in turn exchanges for another sum of value, namely consumer goods.

It is to be noted that the laborer does not exchange creative power for creative power. When the worker sells his labor-power as abstract labor in the form of value, he totally alienates his creative power. When the capitalist buys a given quantity of the worker’s labor-power, say eight hours of labor-power, he does not appropriate merely a part of that quantity, say four hours, in the form of surplus labor; the capitalist appropriates all eight hours of the worker’s labor-power. This labor-power then crystallizes, congeals in a given quantity of commodities which the capitalist sells on the market, which he exchanges as values for equivalent sums of money. And what the laborer gets back for his alienated labor-power is a sum of money which is “equivalent in value” to the labor-power. This relation of exchange of “equivalent values”, namely the exchange of a given number of hours of labor-power for a given sum of money, conceals a quantitative as well as a qualitative aspect of exploitation. The quantitative aspect was treated by Marx in

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48 David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1963, p. 45

his theory of exploitation, developed in Volume I of *Capital*. The amount which the capitalist receives in exchange for the commodities he sells on the market is larger than the amount which he spends for the production of the commodities, which means that the capitalist appropriates a surplus in the form of profit. The qualitative aspect was treated by Marx in his theory of alienation, and further developed in the theory of commodity fetishism. The two terms of the equivalence relation are not equivalent qualities; they are different in kind. What the worker receives in exchange for his alienated creative power is an “equivalent” only in a commodity economy, where man’s creative power is reduced to a marketable commodity and sold as a value. In exchange for his creative power the worker receives a wage or a salary, namely a sum of money, and in exchange for this money he can purchase products of labor, but he cannot purchase creative power. In other words, in exchange for his creative power the laborer gets things. Thus when Marx speaks of the capitalist’s appropriation of “surplus value” or “surplus labor”, he refers to the quantitative aspect of exploitation, not the qualitative aspect. Qualitatively, the laborer alienates the entirety of his creative power, his power to participate consciously in shaping his material environment with the productive forces he inherits from previous technological development. This means that “it is true that men do rent out their services for a price” (Samuelson), and as a result, “The less you *are*, the less you express your own life, the greater is your *alienated* life, the more you *have* . . .”<sup>49</sup>

In a commodity economy, people relate to each other only through, and by means of, the exchange of things; the relation of purchase and sale is “the basic relation of commodity society” (Rubin, p. 15). Production relations among people are established through the exchange of things because “permanent, direct relations between determined persons who are owners of different factors of productions, do not exist. The capitalist, the wage laborer, as well as the landowner, are *commodity owners* who are formally independent from each other. Direct production relations among them have yet to be established, and then in a form which is usual for commodity owners, namely in the form of *purchase and sale*” (Rubin, p. 18; italics in original). It is on the

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49 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 150.

basis of these reified social relations, namely on the basis of production relations which are realized through the exchange of things, that the process of production is carried out in the capitalist society, because the “production relations which are established among the representatives of the different social classes (the capitalist, worker and landlord), result in a given combination of technical factors of production . . .”(Rubin, p.19). Thus it is through, and by means of, these reified social relations that productive forces, namely technology, are developed in capitalist society.

The capitalist's appropriation of the alienated creative power of society takes the form of an appropriation of things, the form of accumulation of capital. And it is precisely this accumulation of capital that defines the capitalist as a capitalist: “The capitalist's status in production is determined by his ownership of capital, of means of production, of things . . .”(Rubin, p. 19). Thus in Volume III of *Capital*, Marx says that “the capitalist is merely capital personified and functions in the process of production solely as the agent of capital”<sup>50</sup> and thus Rubin speaks of the “personification of things” (Rubin, Chapter 3). The capital gives the capitalist the power to buy equipment and raw materials, to buy labor-power, to engage the material and human agents in a productive activity which results in a given sum of commodities. In this process, the capital “pumps a definite quantity of surplus-labour out of the direct producers, or laborers; capital obtains this surplus-labour without an equivalent, and in essence it always remains forced labour – no matter how much it may seem to result from free contractual agreement.”<sup>51</sup> In capitalist society a man without capital does not have the power to establish these relations. Thus, superficially, it seems that capital, a thing, possesses the power to hire labor, to buy equipment, to combine the labor and the equipment in a productive process, to yield profit and interest, “it seems that the thing itself possesses the ability, the *virtue*, to establish production relations.” (Rubin, p. 21). In the words of the official American textbook, “Wages are the return to labor; interest the return to capital; rent the return to land.”<sup>52</sup> Marx called this

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50 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966, p. 819.

51 Marx, *Capital, III*, p. 819.

52 Samuelson, *Economics*, p. 591.



the Trinity Formula of capitalism: "In the formula: capital – interest, land – ground-rent, labour – wages, capital, land and labour appear respectively as sources of interest (instead of profit), ground-rent and wages, as their products, or fruits, the former are the basis, the latter the consequence, the former are the cause, the latter the effect; and indeed, in such a manner that each individual source is related to its product as to that which is ejected and produced by it."<sup>53</sup> Capital is a thing which has the power to yield interest, land is a thing which has the power to yield rent, labor is a thing which has the power to yield wages, and money "transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, hate into love, virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence, and intelligence into idiocy,"<sup>54</sup> or as American banks advertise, "money works for you." Rubin states that "vulgar economists . . . assign the power to increase the productivity of labor which is inherent in the means of production and represents their technical function, to capital, i.e., a specific social form of production (theory of productivity of capital)" (Rubin, p. 28), and the economist who represents the post-World War II consensus of the American economics profession writes in 1967 that "capital has a net productivity (or real interest yield) that can be expressed in the form of a percentage per annum . . ."<sup>55</sup>

A thing which possesses such powers is a fetish, and the fetish world "is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which Mister Capital and Mistress Land carry on their goblin tricks as social characters and at the same time as mere things."<sup>56</sup> Marx had defined this phenomenon in the first volume of *Capital*: ". . . a definite social relation between men . . . assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings

53 Marx, *Capital*, III, p. 816.

54 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 169.

55 Samuelson, *Economics*, p. 572.

56 Marx, *Capital* III, p. 830, where the last part of this passage reads: ". . . in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things." The version quoted above is from *Marx on Economics*, edited by Robert Freedman, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961, p. 65.

endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. This Fetishism of commodities has its origin . . . in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them."<sup>57</sup> The fetishist, systematically attributing to things the outcomes of social relations, is led to bizarre conclusions: "What is profit the return to? . . . the economist, after careful analysis, ends up relating the concept of profit to dynamic innovation and uncertainty, and to the problems of monopoly and incentives."<sup>58</sup> Rubin points out that, "Instead of considering technical and social phenomena as different aspects of human working activity, aspects which are closely related but different, vulgar economists put them on the same level, on the same scientific plane so to speak . . . This identification of the process of production with its social forms . . . cruelly revenges itself" (Rubin, p. 28), and the economists are astonished to find that "what they have just thought to have defined with great difficulty as a thing suddenly appears as a social relation and then reappears to tease them again as a thing, before they have barely managed to define it as a social relation."<sup>59</sup>

The forces of production "alienated from labour and confronting it independently"<sup>60</sup> in the form of capital, give the capitalist power over the rest of society. "The capitalist glows with the reflected light of his capital" (Rubin, p.25), and he is able to glow only because the productive power of the workers has been crystallized in productive forces and accumulated by the capitalist in the form of capital. The capitalist, as possessor of capital, now confronts the rest of society as the one at whose discretion production and consumption take place; he confronts society as its ruler. This process is celebrated in the official economics textbook: "Profits and high factor returns are the bait; the carrots dangled before us enterprising donkeys. Losses are our penalty kicks.

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57 Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 72; New York: Random House, 1906 edition, p. 83.

58 Samuelson, *Economics*, p. 591.

59 Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 31.

60 Marx, *Capital, III*, p. 824.

Profits go to those who have been efficient in the past – efficient in making things, in selling things, in foreseeing things. Through profits, society is giving the command over new ventures to those who have piled up a record of success.”<sup>61</sup>

It can now be shown that the preceding sequence is a detailed development, clarification, and concretization of the theory of alienation which Marx had presented in 1844. This can be seen by comparing the sequence with a passage cited earlier, written a quarter of a century before the publication of the theory of commodity fetishism in the first volume of *Capital*, and nearly half a century before the third volume: “The object produced by labour, its product, now stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour which has been embodied in an object, and turned into a physical thing; this product is an *objectification* of labour . . . The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, takes on its own existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force.”<sup>62</sup> This passage seems, in retrospect, like a summary of the theory of commodity fetishism. However, the definitions, the concepts, the detailed relationships which the passage seems to summarize were developed by Marx only decades later.

The next task is to examine Marx’s theory of value within the context of his theory of commodity fetishism, since, as Rubin points out, “The theory of fetishism is, *per se*, the basis of Marx’s entire economic system, and in particular of his theory of value” (Rubin, p. 5). In this context, Rubin distinguishes three aspects of value: it is “(1) a social relation among *people*, (2) which assumes a *material* form and (3) is related to the process of *production*” (Rubin, p.63). The subject of the theory of value is the working activity of people, or as Rubin defines it: “The subject matter of the theory of value is the *interrelations of various forms of labor* in the process of their distribution, which is established

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61 Samuelson, *Economics*, p. 602.

62 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 108; the passage given above is quoted from Bottomore and Rubell, *op. cit.*, p. 170–171.

through the relation of exchange among things, *i.e.*, products of labor” (Rubin, p. 67). In other words, the subject of the theory of value is labor as it is manifested in the commodity economy: here labor does not take the form of conscious, creative participation in the process of transforming the material environment; it takes the form of abstract labor which is congealed in commodities and sold on the market as value. “The specific character of the commodity economy consists of the fact that the material-technical process of production is not directly regulated by society but is directed by individual commodity producers . . . The *private* labor of separate commodity producers is connected with the labor of all other commodity producers and becomes social labor only if the product of one producer is equalized as a value with all other commodities” (Rubin, p.70). Before analyzing how labor is allocated through the equalization of things, namely how human activity is regulated in capitalist society, Rubin points out that the form which labor takes in capitalist society is the form of value: “The reification of labor in value is the most important conclusion of the theory of fetishism, which explains the inevitability of ‘reification’ of production relations among people in a commodity economy” (Rubin, p.72). Thus the theory of value is about the regulation of labor; it is this fact that most critics of the theory failed to grasp.

The question Marx raises is how the working activity of people is regulated in capitalist society. His theory of value is offered as an answer to this question. It will be shown that most critics do not offer a different answer to the question Marx raises, they object to the question. In other words, economists do not say that Marx gives erroneous answers to the question he raises, but that he gives erroneous answers to the questions they raise:

Marx asks: How is human working activity regulated in a capitalist economy?

Marx answers: Human working activity is alienated by one class, appropriated by another class, congealed in commodities, and sold on a market in the form of value.

The economists answer: Marx is wrong. Market price is not determined by labor; it is determined by the price of production and by demand. “The great Alfred Marshall” insisted that “market price – that

is, economic value – was determined by both supply and demand, which interact with one another in much the same way as Adam Smith described the operation of competitive markets.”<sup>63</sup>

Marx was perfectly aware of the role of supply and demand in determining market price, as will be shown below. The point is that Marx did not ask what determines market price; he asked how working activity is regulated.

The shift of the question began already in the 1870's, before the publication of the second and third volumes of Marx's *Capital*. At that time capitalist economists revived the utility theory of value of Jean Baptiste Say and the supply-demand theory of price of Augustin Cournot,<sup>64</sup> both of which were developed in the early 19th century. The virtue of both approaches was that they told nothing about the regulation of human working activity in capitalist society, and this fact strongly recommended them to the professional economists of a business society. The revival of Say and Cournot was hailed as a new discovery, since the “new principle” drew a heavy curtain over the questions Marx had raised. “The new principle was a simple one: the value of a product or service is due not to the labor embodied in it but to the usefulness of the last unit purchased. That, in essence, was the principle of marginal utility”, according to the historian Füsfield.<sup>65</sup> In the eyes of the American economist Robert Campbell, the reappearance of the utility theory brought order into chaos: “The reconciliation of all these conflicting partial explanations into a unified general theory of value came only in the late nineteenth century with the concept of general equilibrium and the reduction of all explanations to the common denominator of utility by the writers of the utility school.”<sup>66</sup> Füsfield points out the main reason for the excitement: “One of the most impor-

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63 Daniel R. Füsfield, *The Age of the Economist*, Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1966, p. 74.

64 Jean Baptiste Say, *Traité d'économie politique*, first published in 1803. Augustin Cournot, *Recherches sur les principes mathématiques de la théorie des richesses*, 1838. The revival was carried out in the 1870's by Karl Menger, William Stanley Jevons, and Leon Walras, and the work was “synthesized” by Alfred Marshall in the 1890's.

65 *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

66 Robert Campbell, “Marxian Analysis, Mathematical Methods, and Scientific Economic Planning”, in Shaffer, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

tant conclusions drawn from this line of thinking was that a system of free markets tended to maximize individual welfare.”<sup>67</sup> It was once again possible to take for granted without questioning precisely what Marx had questioned. After hailing the reappearance of the utility theory, Campbell goes on to redefine economics in such a way as to exclude the very questions Marx had raised. Campbell does this explicitly: “One reflection of this new insight into the problem of value was the formulation of a new definition of economics, the one commonly used today, as the theory of allocation of scarce resources among competing ends.”<sup>68</sup> Without mentioning that his own ideas about value were extant at the time of Ricardo, the scientific economist Campbell proceeds to dispose of Marx for retaining “ideas about value extant at the time of Ricardo”. Campbell then uses the restrained, objective language of American social science to summarize Marx’s life work: “Marx took the theory of value as it then existed, and compounded from some of its confusions a theory of the dynamics of the capitalist system. (It might be more accurate to describe the process the other way round: Marx had the conclusions and was trying to show how they flowed rigorously and inevitably from the theory of value then generally accepted. With the benefit of hindsight we may look back on his effort as a *reductio ad absurdum* technique for proving the deficiencies of Ricardian value theory.)” On the basis of this thorough analysis of Marx’s work, Campbell dispassionately concludes: “Thus the bondage of a Marxist heritage in economic theory is not so much that the Marxist view is simply wrong in one particular (i.e., that it assumes that value is created only by labor) as that it does not comprehend the basic problem of economic theory . . . it has not achieved a full understanding of what a valid economic theory must illuminate. That achievement came in the mainstream of world economic theorizing only after Marxism had already taken the turning to enter the blind alley mentioned above.”<sup>69</sup> With economics thus redefined and Marx disposed of, it becomes possible, once again, to hold on to “a theory of

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67 Fusfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

68 Campbell, *loc. cit*

69 *Ibid.*

value on the basis of analysis of the act of exchange as such, isolated from a determined social-economic context” (Rubin, pp. 85–86).

Thus economists did not replace Marx’s answers to his questions with more accurate answers; they threw out the questions, and replaced them with questions about scarcity and market price; thus economists “shifted the whole focus of economics away from the great issue of social classes and their economic interests, which has been emphasized by Ricardo and Marx, and centered economic theory upon the individual.”<sup>70</sup> Fufeld also explains why the economists shifted the focus: “The economists and their highly abstract theories were part of the same social and intellectual development that brought forth the legal theories of Stephen Field and the folklore of the self-made man”,<sup>71</sup> *i.e.*, the economists are ideologically at one with the ruling class, the capitalists, or as Samuelson put it, “Profits and high factor returns are the bait, the carrots dangled before us enterprising donkeys.”<sup>72</sup>

Even theorists whose primary aim was not the celebration of capitalism have interpreted Marx’s theory of value as a theory of resource allocation or a theory of price, and have underemphasized or even totally overlooked the sociological and historical context of the theory. This does not mean that problems of resource allocation or price have nothing to do with a historical and sociological analysis of capitalism, or that the elucidation of one aspect will necessarily add nothing to the understanding of the others. The point here is that a theory of resource allocation or a price theory need not explain why human working activity is regulated through things in the capitalist historical form of economy, since the theory of resource allocation or the price theory can begin its analysis by taking capitalism for granted. At the same time, a historical and sociological analysis of the capitalist economy need not explain the allocation of resources or the components of price in its attempt to characterize the form which human working activity assumes in a given historical context. A price theorist may concern himself explicitly with the social form of the economy whose prices he examines, just as Marx did concern himself explicitly with problems of

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<sup>70</sup> Fufeld, *op. cit.*, p. 74

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>72</sup> *Economics*, pp. 601–602; quoted earlier.

price and allocation. But this does not mean that all price theorists or resource allocators necessarily exhaust the sociological and historical problems, or even that they have the slightest awareness of capitalism as a specific historical form of economy, just as it does not mean that Marx necessarily exhausted the problems of price determination or resource allocation, even though he had far more profound awareness of these problems than most of his superficial critics, and even some of his superficial followers, give him credit for.

Oskar Lange pointed out that “leading writers of the Marxist school” looked to Marx for a price theory, and consequently “they saw and solved the problem only within the limits of the labor theory of value, being thus subject to all the limitations of the classical theory.”<sup>73</sup> Yet Lange himself saw Marx’s theory of value as an attempt to solve the problem of resource allocation. According to Lange, Marx “seems to have thought of labor as the only kind of scarce resource to be distributed between different uses and wanted to solve the problem by the labor theory of value.”<sup>74</sup> It was rather Lange who devoted himself to developing a theory of resource allocation, not Marx, and “the unsatisfactory character of this solution”<sup>75</sup> is clearly due to the fact that Marx’s theory was not presented as a solution to Lange’s problems.

Fred Gottheil, in a recent book on Marx, explicitly reduces Marx’s theory of value to a theory of price. Unlike superficial critics of Marx, Gottheil points out that Marx was aware that in capitalist society prices are not determined by the “labor content” of commodities: “The concept of price which is incorporated in the analysis of the Marxian economic system is, without exception, the prices-of-production concept . . .”<sup>76</sup> However, by reducing Marx’s theory of value to a price theory, Gottheil pulls Marx’s theory out of its sociological and historical context (Gottheil does not even mention Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism). In this way Gottheil reduces Marx’s historical and sociological analysis of the commodity capitalist economy to a mechanistic

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73 Oskar Lange, *On the Economic Theory of Socialism*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1964 (published together with an essay by Fred M. Taylor), p. 141.

74 *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133.

75 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

76 Fred M. Gottheil, *Marx’s Economic Predictions*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966, p. 27.



system from which Gottheil mechanically derives over 150 “predictions”.

Joan Robinson knows that the construction of a theory of price was not the primary aim of Marx’s analysis, and says that Marx “felt obliged to offer a theory of relative prices, but though he thought it essential we can see that it is irrelevant to the main point of his argument.”<sup>77</sup> However, Robinson seems to be unaware of just what “the point of the argument” was: “The point of the argument was something quite different. Accepting the dogma that all things exchange at prices proportional to their *values*, Marx applies it to labour power. This is the clue that explains capitalism. The worker receives his *value*, his cost in terms of labour-time, and the employer makes use of him to produce more value than he costs.”<sup>78</sup> Having reduced Marx’s work to this “argument”, Robinson is able to conclude: “On this plane the whole argument appears to be metaphysical, it provides a typical example of the way metaphysical ideas operate. Logically it is a mere rigmarole of words but for Marx it was a flood of illumination and for latter-day Marxists, a source of inspiration.”<sup>79</sup>

In an essay written more than half a century before Joan Robinson’s *Economic Philosophy*, Thorstein Veblen came much closer than Robinson to “the point” of Marx’s work: “. . . within the domain of unfolding human culture, which is the field of Marxian speculation at large, Marx has more particularly devoted his efforts to an analysis and theoretical formulation of the present situation – the current phase of the process, the capitalistic system. And, since the prevailing mode of the production of goods determines the institutional, intellectual, and spiritual life of the epoch, by determining the form and method of the current class struggle, the discussion necessarily begins with the theory of ‘capitalistic production,’ or production as carried on under the capitalistic system.”<sup>80</sup> Veblen was also acutely aware of the irrelevance of

77 Joan Robinson, *Economic Philosophy*, Garden City: Anchor Books, 1964, p. 35.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 37, Italics in original.

79 *Ibid.*

80 Thorstein Veblen, “The Socialist Economics of Karl Marx”, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol: XX, Aug., 1906; reprinted in *The Portable Veblen*, edited by Max Lerner, New York: Viking Press, 1948, p. 284. In a footnote, Veblen adds the explanation that “in Marxian usage ‘capitalistic production’ means production of goods for the market by hired labour under the direction of employers who own (or con-

critiques based on a reduction of Marx's theory of value to a price theory: "Marx's critics commonly identify the concept of 'value' with that of 'exchange value,' and show that the theory of 'value' does not square with the run of the facts of price under the existing system of distribution, piously hoping thereby to have refuted the Marxian doctrine, whereas, of course, they have for the most part not touched it."<sup>81</sup>

Marx's method, his approach to the problem he raised, was designed to cope with that problem, not with the problems raised by his critics, i.e., to answer how the distribution of labor is regulated, and not why people buy goods, or how resources are allocated, or what determines market price. Thus it was not in order to define what determines market price, but in order to focus on the problem of the regulation of labor that Marx abstracted from the real capitalist economy, that he reduced it to its bare essentials, so to speak. Capitalism is a commodity economy; social relations are not established directly but through the exchange of things. In order to learn how labor is regulated in an economy where this regulation takes place through the exchange of things, Marx constructs a model of a "simple commodity economy", namely an abstract economy in which social relations are established through the exchange of things, and in which the ratio around which commodities tend to exchange is determined by the labor-time expended on their production. The statement that commodities exchange in terms of the labor-time expended on their production is then a tautology, since it is contained in the definition of Marx's model. The point of the abstraction is to focus on the regulation of labor in a commodity economy, not to answer what determines price in the actual capitalist society. In this context it is irrelevant to observe that there are "other factors of production" (such as land and capital) since, as Rubin points out, "the theory of value does not deal with labor as a technical factor of production, but with the working activity of people as the basis of the life of society, and with the social forms within which that labor is carried out" (Rubin, p. 82). It is also irrelevant to point out that "things other than labor" are exchanged, since "Marx does not analyze

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trol) the means of production and are engaged in industry for the sake of a profit."

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 287–288.

every exchange of things, but only the equalization of commodities through which the social equalization of labor is carried out in the commodity economy” (Rubin, p. 101). Marx’s abstraction is not designed to explain everything; it is designed to explain the regulation of labor in a commodity economy.

In Chapter 2 of his economics textbook, Paul Samuelson finds Marx’s method totally unacceptable. This academician, whose significance in American economics can probably be compared to Lysenko’s in Soviet genetics, summarizes Marx’s theory of value as follows: “The famous ‘labor theory of value’ was adapted by Karl Marx from such classical writers as Adam Smith and David Ricardo. There is no better introduction to it than to quote from Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*. Smith employed the quaint notion of a Golden Age, a kind of Eden, wherein dwelt the noble savage before land and capital had become scarce and when human labor alone counted.”<sup>82</sup> Having demonstrated his understanding of the theory, Samuelson then proceeds to a critical analysis of it, using the objective, restrained, non-ideological language of the American social sciences: “Karl Marx, a century ago in *Das Kapital* (1867), unfortunately clung more stubbornly than Smith to the oversimple labor theory. This provided him with a persuasive terminology for declaiming against ‘exploitation of labor’, but constituted bad scientific economics . . .”<sup>83</sup> Before driving his demonstration to its conclusion, Samuelson offers his own theory of the origins of private property; property grows out of scarcity just as naturally as babies grow out of wombs: “But suppose that we have left Eden and Agricultural goods do require, along with labor, fertile land *that has grown scarce enough to have become private property*.”<sup>84</sup> On the basis of this profound historical and sociological analysis of the economy in which he lives, the American Lysenko concludes: “Once factors other than labor become scarce . . . The labor theory of value fails. Q.E.D.”<sup>85</sup>

However, in Chapter 34 of the same textbook, the same Samuelson explains the “Law of Comparative Advantage” with the same method of

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<sup>82</sup> Samuelson, *Economics*, p. 27.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, italics by Samuelson.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

abstraction which Marx had used, namely he employs the same labor theory of value<sup>86</sup> in the same manner, and he refers to the same source, Ricardo. Samuelson even tells the reader that later on he “can give some of the needed qualifications when our simple assumptions are relaxed.”<sup>87</sup> In the introduction to his textbook, Samuelson even defends the method of abstraction: “Even if we had more and better data, it would still be necessary as in every science to *simplify*, to *abstract*, from the infinite mass of detail. No mind can comprehend a bundle of unrelated facts. All analysis involves abstraction. It is always necessary to *idealize*, to omit detail, to set up simple hypotheses and patterns by which the facts can be related, to set up the right questions before going out to look at the world as it is.”<sup>88</sup> Thus Samuelson cannot be opposed to Marx’s method of analysis; what bothers him is the subject matter; what he opposes is analysis which asks why it is that “In our system individual capitalists earn interest, dividends, and profits, or rents and royalties on the capital goods that they supply. Every patch of land and every bit of equipment has a deed, or ‘title of ownership,’ that belongs to somebody directly – or it belongs to a corporation, then indirectly it belongs to the individual stockholders who own the corporation.”<sup>89</sup> Samuelson has already told his readers the answer: “Through profits, society is giving the command over new ventures to those who have piled up a record of success.”<sup>90</sup>

Rubin points out that Marx’s “simple commodity economy” cannot be treated as a historical stage that preceded capitalism: “This is a theoretical abstraction and not a picture of the historical transition from simple commodity economy to capitalist economy” (Rubin, p. 257). Consequently, the “labor theory of value is a theory of a simple commodity economy, not in the sense that it explains the type of economy that preceded the capitalist economy, but in the sense that it describes only one aspect of the capitalist economy, namely production

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86 From Samuelson’s explanation of the law of comparative advantage: “In America a unit of food costs 1 days’ labor and a unit of clothing costs 2 days’ labor. In Europe the cost is 3 days’ labor for food and 4 days’ labor for clothing,” etc. *Ibid.*, p. 649.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 648.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 8. Samuelson’s italics.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 50.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 602.

relations among commodity producers which are characteristic for every commodity economy” (Rubin, p.255). Marx was perfectly aware that he could not “construct the theory of the capitalist economy directly from the labor theory of value and . . . avoid the intermediate links, average profit and production price. He characterized such attempts as ‘attempts to force and directly fit concrete relations to the elementary relation of value; attempts which present as existing that which does not exist’”(Rubin, p.255).

Rubin’s book analyzes the connections between technology and social relations in a commodity economy where people do not relate to each other directly but through the products of their labor. In this economy, a technical improvement is not experienced directly by the producers as an enhancement of life, and is not accompanied by a conscious transformation of working activity. The working activity is transformed, not in response to the enhanced productive power of society, but in response to changes in the value of products. “The moving force which transforms the entire system of value originates in the material-technical process of production. The increase of productivity of labor is expressed in a decrease of the quantity of concrete labor which is factually used up in production, on the average. As a result of this (because of the dual character of labor, as concrete and abstract), the quantity of this labor, which is considered ‘social’ or ‘abstract,’ i.e., as a share of the total, homogeneous labor of the society, decreases. The increase of productivity of labor changes the quantity of abstract labor necessary for production. It causes a change in the value of the product of labor. A change in the value of products in turn affects the distribution of social labor among the various branches of production . . . this is the schema of a commodity economy in which value plays the role of regulator, establishing equilibrium in the distribution of social labor among the various branches . . .”(Rubin, p. 66).

In the concrete conditions of the capitalist economy this process is more complex, but in spite of the added complexities the regulation of the productive activities of people is still carried out through the movement of things. In the capitalist economy “the distribution of capital leads to the distribution of social labor” (Rubin, p. 226). However, “our goal (as before) is to analyze the laws of distribution of social labor”

(Rubin, p. 228), and consequently “we must resort to a round-about path and proceed to a preliminary analysis of the *laws of distribution of capital*”. (*Ibid.*) The task becomes further complicated by the fact that, “if we assume that the distribution of labor is determined by the distribution of capital which acquires meaning as an intermediate link in the causal chain, then the formula of the distribution of labor depends on the formula of the distribution of capitals: unequal masses of labor which are activated by equal capitals are equalized with each other” (p. 235). The gap between the distribution of capital and the distribution of labor is bridged through the concept of the organic composition of capital, which establishes a relation between the two processes (p. 237).

In his analysis, Rubin assumes “the existence of competition among capitalists engaged in different branches of production” and also “the possibility for the transfer of capital from one branch to another” (p. 230).<sup>91</sup> With these assumptions, “the rate of profit becomes the regulator of the distribution of capital” (p. 229). Rubin defines profit as “the surplus of the selling price of the commodity over the costs of its production” (p. 230). And a change in the cost of production is “in the last analysis caused by changes in the productivity of labor and in the labor-value of some goods” (p. 251). Schematically, the process can be summarized as follows. Technical change causes a change in the productivity of labor. This changes the amount of alienated, abstract labor which is congealed in certain commodities, and consequently changes the value of those commodities. This in turn affects the costs of production of branches which use the given commodities in their production process, and thus affects the profits of capitalists in those branches. The change in the profitability of the affected branches leads capitalists to move their capitals to other branches, and this movement of capitals in turn leads to a movement of workers to the other branches (although the movement of laborers is not necessarily proportional to the movement of capitals, since this depends on the organic composi-

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91 Rubin does not treat cases where the assumptions of perfect competition and perfect mobility of capital do not hold. Thus he does not extend his analysis to problems of imperialism, monopoly, militarism, domestic colonies (which today would come under the heading of racism). Rubin also does not treat changes in production relations caused by the increased scale and power of productive forces, some of which Marx had begun to explore in the third volume of *Capital* and does not treat its development or its transformations.

tion of capital). Rubin's conclusion is that the regulation of labor in the capitalist society differs only in complexity, but not in kind, from the regulation of labor in a simple commodity economy: "Anarchy in social production; the absence of direct social relations among producers; mutual influence of their working activities through things which are the products of their labor; the connection between the movement of production relations among people and the movement of things in the process of material production; 'reification' of production relations, the transformation of their properties into the properties of 'things'- *all of these phenomena of commodity fetishism are equally present in every commodity economy, simple as well as capitalist.* They characterize labor-value and production price the same way" (p. 253, Rubin's italics). The first volume of *Capital* provides the context, the second volume describes the mechanism, and the third volume treats in detail the formidable process through which "the object produced by labour, its product, now stands opposed to it as an *alien being*, as a *power independent* of the producer;" the process through which "the life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force."





# **PART THREE:**

# **CRITIQUE OF LEADERS**

# Ten Theses on the Proliferation of Egocrats

First published in the September 1977 edition of the Detroit based magazine *Fifth Estate*, this essay criticizes the dubious practices of anarchist and libertarian militants that Perlman encountered.

## I

The Egocrat – Mao, Stalin, Hitler, Kim Il Sung – is not an accident or an aberration or an irruption of irrationality; he is a personification of the relations of the existing social order.

## II

The Egocrat is initially an individual, like everyone else: mute and powerless in this society without community or communication, victimized by the spectacle, “the existing order’s uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue, the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence.” (Debord) Repelled by the spectacle, he longs for “the liberated human being, a being who is at once a social being and a *Gemeinwesen*.” (Camatte) If his longing were expressed in practice: at his workplace, in the street, wherever the spectacle robs him of his humanity, he would become a rebel.

## III

The Egocrat does not express his longing for community and communication in practice; he transforms it into a Thought. Armed with this

Thought, he is still mute and powerless, but is no longer like everyone else: he is Conscious, he possesses the Idea. To confirm his difference, to make sure he's not deluding himself, he needs to be seen as different by others – those others who confirm that he is truly a possessor of the Thought.

#### IV

The Egocrat finds “community” and “communication,” not by smashing the elements of the spectacle in his reach, but by surrounding himself with like-minded individuals, other Egos, who reflect the Golden Thought to each other and confirm each other's validity as possessors of it. Chosen People. At this point the Thought, if it is to remain golden, must evermore remain the same: unsullied and uncompromised; criticism and revision are synonyms of betrayal, “Thus it can only exist as a polemic with reality. It refutes everything. It can survive only by freezing, by becoming increasingly totalitarian.” (Camatte) Therefore, in order to continue to reflect and confirm the Thought, the individual must stop thinking.

#### V

The initial goal, the “liberated human being,” is lost to practice when it is relegated to the Egocrat's consciousness, because “consciousness makes itself the goal and reifies itself in an organization which comes to incarnate the goal.” (Camatte) The group of mutual admirers acquires a schedule and a meeting place; it becomes an institution. The organization, which takes the form of a Bolshevik or Nazi cell, a Socialist reading club, or an Anarchist affinity group, depending on local circumstances and individual preferences, “provides a terrain favorable to informal domination 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” (wrote Debord, describing anarchist organi-

zations). Rejecting the ruling spectacle ideologically, the organization of specialists in freedom reproduces the relation of the spectacle in its internal practice.

## VI

The organization incarnating the Thought turns on the world, because “the project of this consciousness is to frame reality with its concept.” (Camatte) The group becomes militant. It sets out to extend to society at large the organization’s internal relations, one variant of which can be summarized as follows: “Within the party, there must be no one lagging behind when an order is given by the leadership to ‘march forward,’ no one turning right when the order is ‘left.’” (a revolutionary leader, quoted by M. Velli.) At this point the specific content of the Thought is as irrelevant to practice as the geography of the Christian paradise, because the goal is reduced to a cudgel: it serves as the justification for the group’s repressive practices, and as an instrument of blackmail. (Examples: “To deviate from socialist ideology in the slightest degree means strengthening bourgeois ideology.” Lenin, quoted by M. Velli; “When ‘libertarians’ slanderously trash others, I question their maturity and commitment to revolutionary social change” an ‘anarchist’ in a letter to The Fifth Estate.)

## VII

The militant organization extends itself by means of conversion and manipulation. Conversion is the favored technique of early Bolshevism and missionary anarchism: the militant’s explicit task is to introduce consciousness into the working class (Lenin), to “reach working people with our ideas” (an “anarchist” in “The Red Menace,” Toronto). But the militant’s implicit task, and the practical outcome of his activity, is to affect the practice of the workers, not their thought. The conversion is successful if workers, whatever their ideas, pay dues to the organization and obey the organization’s calls to action (strikes, demonstrations, etc.). The Egocrat’s implicit aim is to establish his (and his organization’s) hegemony over a large number of individuals, to become the leader of a mass of followers. This implicit aim becomes cynically

explicit when the militants are Nazis or Stalinists (or an amalgam of the two, such as the US Labor Party). Conversion gives way to manipulation, outright lying. In this model, the recruitment of followers is the explicit aim, and the Idea ceases to be a fixed star, perfect and immutable; the Idea becomes a mere means toward the explicit aim; whatever recruits most followers is a good Idea; the Idea becomes a cynically constructed collage based on the fears and hatreds of potential followers; its main promise is the annihilation of scapegoats: “counter-revolutionaries,” “anarchists,” “CIA agents,” “Jews,” etc. The difference between manipulators and missionaries is theoretical; in practice, they are contemporaries competing in the same social field, and they borrow each other’s techniques.

## VIII

In order to broadcast the Idea, so as to convert or manipulate, the Egocrat needs instruments, media, and it is precisely such media that the society of the spectacle provides in profusion. One justification for turning to these media runs as follows: “The media are currently a monopoly of the ruling classes who divert them for their own benefit. But their structure remains ‘fundamentally egalitarian,’ and it is up to revolutionary practice to bring out this potentiality contained by them but perverted by the capitalist order. In a word, to liberate them...” (a position paraphrased by Baudrillard.) The initial rejection of the spectacle, the longing for community and communication, has been replaced by the longing to exert power over the very instruments that annihilate community and communication. Hesitation, or a sudden outburst of critique, are ruled out by organizational blackmail: “The Leninists will win unless we ourselves accept the responsibility of fighting to win...,” (“The Red Menace.” A Stalinist would say, “The Trotskyists will win...,” etc.) From this point on, anything goes; all means are good if they lead to the goal; and at the absurd outer limit, even sales promotion and advertising, the activity and language of Capital itself, become justified revolutionary means: “We concentrate heavily on distribution and promotion...Our promotional work is wide-ranging and expensive. It includes advertising widely, promotional

mailings, catalogues, display tables across the country, etc. All of this costs a tremendous amount of money and energy, which is covered by the money generated from the sale of books.” (An “anarchist businessman” in a letter to The Fifth Estate.) Is this anarchist businessman a ludicrous example, because so ridiculously exaggerated, or is he solidly within the orthodox tradition of organized militancy? “The big banks are the ‘state apparatus’ which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready made from capitalism; our task here is merely to lop off what capitalistically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it *even bigger*, even more democratic, even more comprehensive...” (Lenin, quoted by M. Velli.)

## IX

For the Egocrat, the media are mere means; the goal is hegemony, power, and the power of the secret police. “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 a badge, without title, without official right, yet all the more powerful because it will have none of the appearances of power.” (Bakunin, quoted by Debord) The collective dictatorship of all quickly becomes the rule of the single Egocrat because, “if all the bureaucrats taken together decide everything, the cohesion of their own class can be assured only by the concentration of their terrorist power in a single person.” (Debord) With the success of the Egocrat’s enterprise, the establishment of the “dictator-ship without official right,” communication is not only absent on a social scale; every local attempt is deliberately liquidated by the police. This situation is not a “deformation” of the organization’s initially “pure goals”; it is already prefigured in the means, the “fundamentally egalitarian” instruments used for the victory. “What characterizes the mass media is the fact that they are anti-mediators, intransitives, the fact that they produce non-communication... Television, by its presence alone, is social control in the home. It is not necessary to imagine this control as the regime’s periscope spying on the private life of everyone, because television is already better than that: it assures that people no longer talk to each other, that

they are definitively isolated in the face of statements without response.” (Baudrillard)

## X

The Egocrat’s project is superfluous. The capitalist media of production and communication already reduce human beings to mute and powerless spectators, passive victims continually subjected to the existing order’s “laudatory monologue.” The anti-totalitarian revolution requires, not another medium, but the liquidation of all media, “the liquidation of their entire present structure, functional as well as technical, of their operational form so to speak, which everywhere reflects their social form. At the limit, obviously, it is the very concept of medium which disappears and must disappear: the exchanged word, reciprocal and symbolic exchange, negates the notion and function of medium, of intermediary... Reciprocity comes about by way of the destruction of the medium.” (Baudrillard)

### References:

Jean Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (Paris, Gallimard, 1972)

Jacques Camatte, *The Wandering of Humanity* (Detroit, Black & Red, 1975)

Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, Black & Red, 1970; 1977)

Claude Lefort, *Un Homme en Trop: Reflexions sur "L'Archipel de Goulag,"* Paris, Seuil, 1976

Michael Velli, *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders* (Detroit, Black & Red, 1972)

## The Seizure of State Power

These excerpts are from the third chapter of a book that Perlman co-authored with his wife Lorraine Perlman; *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders* was written under the pseudonym of 'Michael Velli' and published in 1972. The book's aim was to undermine and discredit the manipulative tactics of New Left organisers who used libertarian sounding rhetoric to promote Leninist style political programmes with the intention of installing themselves as a new 'revolutionary' ruling elite. Quotes were gathered from New Left writers and the authoritarian leaders they were seeking to emulate. Statements from Hitler, Mussolini, Ho and Lenin are used as appropriate conclusions for paragraphs taken from *The Guardian*, *New Left Notes* or other publications in which writings from New Left militants had been published. Sources were included in the second edition of the book when it became clear that the irony was lost on a large number of readers.

Without revolutionary leadership, continually changing responses to continually developing productive forces move toward chaos. Without revolutionary organization, attempts of individuals to realize their self-powers to the level made possible by the productive forces move toward anarchy.

Under what conditions can revolutionary leadership and organization be introduced into popular struggles? Under what conditions does an organization capable of seizing State power rise and succeed? Under what conditions might such an organization fail to rise? If it should fail, what alternatives would be left for the organizers who devoted their lives to this historical task?

In the remarks and arguments that follow, I will attempt to find answers to these questions. *In my desire to offer revolutionary leaders*



*some humble testimony of my devotion, I have been unable to find anything which I hold so dear or esteem so highly as that knowledge of the deeds of great men which I have acquired through a long experience of modern events and a constant study of the past. With the utmost diligence I have long pondered and scrutinized the actions of the great, and now I offer the results. I have not sought to adorn my work with long phrases or high-sounding words or any of those superficial attractions and ornaments with which many writers seek to embellish their material, as I desire no honor for my work but such as the novelty and gravity of this subject may justly deserve. Nor will it, I trust, be deemed presumptuous on the part of a man of humble and obscure condition to attempt to discuss revolutionary leadership; for in the same way that landscape painters station themselves in the valleys in order to draw mountains or high ground, and ascend an eminence in order to get a good view of the plains, so it is necessary to be a leader to know thoroughly the nature of the people, and one of the populace to know the nature of leaders.<sup>1</sup>*

The present century is a period of successful seizures of State power by revolutionary leaders. A substantial part of the world's population is experiencing the social consequences of these successes. These historical successes have created the expectation that careful imitation of the deeds of the successful leaders can lead to similar results. It must be said at the outset that this expectation may be unfounded. It may happen that careful application of similar procedures does not lead to similar results. It may happen that devoted revolutionary organizers fail to realize their goal. Aspiring revolutionary leaders may find themselves *faced with a situation in which almost all of the people whose interests are served by these goals, and who should be, or even are, sympathetic to revolution, neither understand the specific tasks involved in making a revolution nor participate in achieving them.*<sup>2</sup>

History does not necessarily absolve all revolutionary leaders who aspire to seize State power. The fact is that the seizure of State power by a revolutionary organization may fail. In the face of the concrete possibility of failure, it becomes necessary for revolutionary leaders to rid themselves of illusions inherited from the past, and to determine with

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1 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, New York, Modern Library, 1950, p. 3.

2 "Weatherman," *New Left Notes*, June 18, 1969, p. 6.

accuracy and care the real conditions for the successful seizure of State power. The assumptions of classical revolutionary theory\* must be re-examined in the light of contemporary practice. We must determine whether or not the conditions described by classical revolutionary theory are historically possible, whether or not they are necessary for the rise of a revolutionary organization, whether or not they suffice to assure the success of such an organization.

The supreme condition for the seizure of State power by a revolutionary organization – a condition which has come to be regarded as self-evident, as a *sine qua non* – is a revolutionary situation, a revolution. According to classical revolutionary theory, such a situation is not synonymous with the rise to power of a revolutionary organization; such a situation is a precondition for the organization's rise to power. Before examining how such a situation creates the field out of which a revolutionary organization can seize power, we will examine what this situation consists of.

According to the classics, *a revolution, a real, profound, a "people's" revolution, is the incredibly complicated and painful process of the death of the old and birth of the new social order, of the mode of life of tens of millions of people.*<sup>3</sup> *It is set in motion by a mighty burst of creative enthusiasm that stems from the people themselves.*<sup>4</sup> *The people and the people alone are the moving force, the creators of universal history. The masses are the real heroes. The popular masses are endowed with unlimited creative powers. They are able to organize and direct their energy to any and all the branches of human activity. They are able to deal with the task of production over its entire expanse and down to its minutest detail.*<sup>5</sup> According to classical revolutionary theory, *such a revolution can be successfully carried out only if the majority of the population, and primarily the majority of the working people, engage in independent*

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\* [Author's note] The fact that revolutionary theory is "classical" is a peculiarity of our age. But this fact is not itself more peculiar than the fact that the main proponents of revolutionary theory are rulers, or the fact that the seizure of State power is the goal of revolutionary organizations, or the fact that leaders, officials, armies and States are revolutionary.

3 V.I. Lenin, Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power? in *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, Moscow, 1967,

4 *Ibid.*, p.399.

5 Mao, *Citations du President Mao Tse Toung*, Peking, 1966, p. 134.

*creative work as makers of history*,<sup>6</sup> and for this reason, *the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself*.<sup>7</sup>

This *independent creative work*<sup>8</sup> on the part of the *creators of universal history*<sup>9</sup> is not the goal or the outcome of a revolutionary situation; according to classical revolutionary theory, this *mighty burst of creative enthusiasm*<sup>10</sup> is the precondition for the seizure of State power by a revolutionary organization; it is the condition without which revolutionary leaders cannot succeed. According to the classics, *no matter how active a group of leaders may be, their activity will amount to nothing more than the sterile efforts of a handful of individuals if it is not related to the activity of the great masses*.<sup>11</sup> This is why the seizure of power by revolutionary leaders *must rely upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people, upon that turning point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemy and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest*.<sup>12</sup> The *mighty burst of creative enthusiasm that stems from the people themselves*<sup>13</sup> is, according to the classics, a necessary condition for the rise and success of the revolutionary organization – and not only a necessary condition, but an *indestructible wall – the masses, the millions on millions of people who support the revolution with all their heart and all their thought are a wall that no force on earth can ever destroy*.<sup>14</sup> Before examining whether or not a revolutionary situation as depicted by classical revolutionary theory is in fact a sufficient or even a necessary condition for the rise and success of a revolutionary organiza-

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6 V.I. Lenin, *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* (1918) in *Selected Works in Three Volumes*, Moscow, 1967, Vol. II, p. 646.

7 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works in Two Volumes*, Moscow, 1962, Vol. I, p. 28.

8 Lenin, see footnote 6.

9 Mao, see footnote 5.

10 Lenin, see footnote 4.

11 Mao, *op. cit.* p. 148.

12 Lenin, *Marxism and Insurrection* (letter written in 1917) in *Selected Works*, Vol II, p. 365.

13 Lenin, see footnote 4.

14 Mao, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

tion, we must first of all ask whether or not such a situation is historically possible.

A revolutionary situation, a situation in which *the majority of the working people engage in independent creative activity*,<sup>15</sup> is a situation of crisis for the dominant social order. The powers of the ruling authorities are *sprung into the air*.<sup>16</sup> These powers are sprung into the air, not by the consciousness of the working people, but by their social practice. People suddenly cease to behave in accordance with the prevailing rules; they become independent and creative. The revolutionary situation consists of independent, creative acts; it consists of individual gestures of rebellion. It is known that the components of a revolutionary situation are historically possible. In fact, individual gestures of rebellion are common, everyday events in any class society.

[. . .]

A revolutionary situation as described by classical revolutionary theory smashes the dominant social order along with all of its bureaucrats. Before turning to the case of revolutionary leaders who have not become functionaries under capitalism, the case of revolutionary organizations which have not already established power within the dominant social order, we might examine more fully the classical description of the revolutionary situation, which is a preliminary condition for the seizure of power by a revolutionary organization. Such a situation is *realized by the initiative of millions, who create a democracy on their own, in their own way*.<sup>17</sup> *The old centralized government gives way to the self government of the producers*.<sup>18</sup> *This is the product of the struggle of the producing against the appropriating class, the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor*.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, according to the classics, the working people know that *in order to work out their own emancipation, and along with it that higher form to which present society is irresistibly tending by its own economical agencies, they will have to pass through long struggles*,

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15 Lenin, see footnote 6.

16 Marx and Engels, Manifesto in *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 44.

17 Lenin, The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution (1917) in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 33.

18 Marx, The Civil War in France in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 520.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 522.

*through a series of historic processes, transforming circumstances and men. They have no ideals to realize, but to set free the elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant.*<sup>20</sup> *In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.*<sup>21</sup> *With labor emancipated, every man becomes a working man, and productive labor ceases to be a class attribute.*<sup>22</sup> *The political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery.*<sup>23</sup> *What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces above all, is its own gravediggers.*<sup>24</sup>

The classical theory of revolution assumes that a social situation which corresponds to the description given above is the preliminary condition for the growth of a revolutionary organization. First of all *the initiative of millions*<sup>25</sup> is a preliminary condition because *all previous historical movements were movements of minorities* whereas the proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority. *The proletariat, the lowest stratum of present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.*<sup>26</sup> Without this preliminary condition, the specific project of a revolutionary organization cannot even be considered. *Is it conceivable that such an organization can be created without first abolishing, destroying the state machine created by the bourgeoisie themselves?*<sup>27</sup> This is not conceivable in classical revolutionary theory; *the precondition of any real people's revolution is the break-up, the shattering of the ready-made state machinery.*<sup>28</sup> *Insurrection must rely upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people.*<sup>29</sup> Without such an upsurge on the part of *the great masses*, the activity of

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20 *Ibid.*, p. 523.

21 Marx and Engels, Manifesto in *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 54.

22 Marx, The Civil War in France, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 522.

23 *Ibid.*

24 Marx and Engels, Manifesto, *loc. cit.*, p. 45.

25 Lenin, see footnote 17.

26 Marx and Engels, Manifesto in *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 44.

27 Lenin, State and Revolution (1918), in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 286.

28 Marx, Letter to Kugelmann (April 12, 1871) cited by Lenin in State and Revolution in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 295.

29 Lenin, see footnote 12.

*no matter how active a group of leaders would be reduced to the sterile efforts of a handful of people.*<sup>30</sup> As soon as such a revolutionary upsurge takes place the revolutionary leaders *must take power at once* – *otherwise a wave of real anarchy may become stronger than we are.*<sup>31</sup> And it is by classical revolutionary theory that *the initiative of millions,*<sup>32</sup> the independent creative activity of the producers also creates the sufficient condition for the revolutionary organization to take *power at once,*<sup>33</sup> namely that an organization which seizes the time and dares to win is bound to succeed: *The entire history of the revolution proves that without the leadership of the working class the revolution fails, and that it succeeds with the leadership of the working class.*<sup>34</sup> *The leadership of the working class means that revolutionary leaders can and must take state power into their own hands.*<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, classical revolutionary theory even ventures to guarantee that once revolutionary leaders have seized State power, nothing will remove them until they have taken State power over the Whole world into their own hands: *Now that the class-conscious workers have built up a party to systematically lay hold of this apparatus and set it in motion with the support of all the working and exploited people – now that these conditions exist, no power on earth can prevent the Bolsheviks, if they do not allow themselves to be scared and if they succeed in taking power, from retaining It until the triumph of the world socialist revolution.*<sup>36</sup>

From the standpoint of revolutionary leaders who today face the possibility of failure, it is critical to reexamine these key assumptions of the classical theory of revolution, because it is this theory and only this theory that *educates the vanguard of the proletariat and makes it*

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30 Mao, see footnote 5.

31 Lenin, Letter to the Central Committee, the Moscow and Petrograd Committees and the Bolshevik Members of the Petrograd and Moscow Soviets (October 1917) in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 424.

32 Lenin, see footnote 17.

33 Lenin, see footnote 31.

34 Mao, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

35 Lenin, The Bolsheviks Must Assume Power, A Letter to the Central Committee and the Petrograd and Moscow Committees of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.) (1917), in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 362.

36 Lenin, Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power? (1917) in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 418.

*capable of assuming power and leading the whole people to socialism, of directing and organizing the new system, of being the teacher, the guide, the leader of all the working and exploited people in organizing their social life without the bourgeoisie and against the bourgeoisie.*<sup>37</sup>

Is it certain that a revolutionary organization that has no vested interest in the ruling system, that has not established posts in the Labor Movement or the government, and that cannot lose these established posts as a result of a major crisis, would be able to seize State power out of the revolutionary situation? Or might there be elements in the revolutionary situation which would obstruct the seizure of State power even by such an organization? Is the revolutionary situation a sufficient condition for the rise of such an organization in a case where the former ruling authorities are not restored?

[. . .]

The revolutionary situation as described by the classical revolutionary theory does not create the necessary conditions for the seizure of State power by revolutionary leaders; on the contrary, we have seen that such a situation destroys the necessary conditions. This conclusion is drastic, but it should not cause undue alarm in the ranks of revolutionary leaders. The conclusion does not say that the project of revolutionary leaders is unrealizable, it merely says that the conditions described by classical revolutionary theory are not in fact the conditions for the realization of this project. It cannot in fact be stated that the project of revolutionary organizations is not historically realizable since such an assertion would fly in the face of hard historical evidence. The seizure of State power by revolutionary leaders is a proved historical possibility. The event which was classically considered to be the necessary condition for this seizure of power is also a historical possibility. All that has been shown so far is that the two events are not related to each other in the way described by classical revolutionary theory.

Our conclusion suggests that classical revolutionary theory saddles revolutionary organizers with a *non sequitur*, that it misinforms them about the nature of the causal relation between two events. It is extremely important for revolutionary leaders to rid themselves of this erroneous assumption about the relation between two key events, since

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37 Lenin, *State and Revolution* (1918), in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p.285.

otherwise they will misconceive the very nature of their project and as a result will almost certainly fail. To understand the magnitude of the misconception, we must try to clarify the nature of the classical assumption and to pinpoint the precise nature of the error.

[...]

The moment which contains the conditions for the seizure of State power, the moment on which revolutionary leaders must rely and during which they must act if they are to succeed, is not the moment when the population gains confidence in its own self-powers, in its creative capacities. On the contrary, *the insurrection must rely upon that turning point in the history of the growing revolution – when the vacillations in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest.*<sup>38</sup> This is not a moment of self-confidence; it is the moment when *the people are close to desperation*, the moment when *that most painful thing on earth, vacillation, has worn the people out.*<sup>39</sup>

The moment for the seizure of power is not a moment of independence, but of anxiety in the face of independence. It is the moment when people are on the verge of independence, when they reach the frontier between the known and the unknown, between the familiar and the new – and temporarily recoil. It is the moment when all the official authorities have been sprung into the air, but when society's individuals have not yet actively appropriated the powers they had vested in the deposed authorities. It is the moment when only one part of the dominant social relation has been sprung into the air – the super-incumbent strata; but when the other part of the same social relation, the subordination, the dependence, the helplessness – has not yet been sprung. It is the moment when the frontier between dependence and independence – precisely because it has not yet been crossed – appears to be an unbridgeable chasm. And it is precisely at this frontier, alongside the human beings who are about to cross it, alongside the *true agents of the revolution*, that the revolutionary frontier officials, the leaders, take their positions. *In every revolution there intrude, alongside*

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38 Lenin, see footnote 12.

39 Lenin, The Bolsheviks Must Assume Power, A Letter to the Central Committee and the Petrograd and Moscow Committees of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.) (1917), in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 367.



*its true agents, men of a different stamp; some of them survivors of and devotees to past revolutions, without insight into the present movement, but preserving popular influence by their known honesty and courage, or by sheer force of tradition; others mere brawlers, who, by dint of repeating year after year the same set of stereotyped declarations against the government of the day, have sneaked into the reputation of revolutionists of the first water. As far as their power goes, they hamper the real action of the working class, exactly as men of that sort have hampered the full development of every previous revolution.*<sup>40</sup> But while hampering the real action of the working class, they pave their own way to the seizure of State power. The successful seizure of power by revolutionary leaders is assured only during the moment before the working class appropriates its powers; it is possible only because the population has not yet become independent: *Our victory is assured because the people are close to desperation.* It is only during the moment before confidence sets in that the leaders of a revolutionary organization *have the exceptional advantage of a situation in which only our victory in the insurrection can put an end to that most painful thing on earth, vacillation, which has worn the people out.*<sup>41</sup>

If revolutionary leaders are to seize the moment when a breach in the social order creates the conditions for their success, they must recognize the error of classical revolutionary theory, they must free themselves of the illusion that their rise coincides with the rise of independent creative activity. If they cling to this illusion and postpone their decisive blow until the moment when independent activity begins, they may well pass up their last chance to take State power into their own hands. The moment which contains the conditions for their success is very brief, whereas the following moment *a wave of real anarchy may become stronger than they are* – and this *wave of real anarchy*<sup>42</sup> may well be the beginning of a process as irreversible as the transition from hunting to agriculture. If a dependent population crossed the frontier to independence, it would remove the conditions for the restoration of the old order, it would no longer need subordination, control or managers,

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40 Marx, *The Civil War in France*, in Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol. I, pp. 528-529.

41 Lenin, see footnote 39.

42 Lenin, see footnote 31.

it would destroy the conditions for the seizure of State power by revolutionary leaders.

The preliminary conditions for the seizure of State power are not in fact conditions for the overthrow of the dominant social order, as classical revolutionary theory would have us believe, but conditions for the restoration of the dominant social order. The moment before independent creative activity begins contains the necessary conditions for both the seizure of State power and the restoration of the old order, and these conditions are in fact the same. These conditions are created by a situation in which the authorities, managers, officials and guards are already gone, but the desperation, vacillation, anxiety and fear are still there. These conditions exist only during the brief moment after the objective relations of dependence are removed, but before the subjective consequences of these relations are removed. These facts have been admitted by successful revolutionary leaders – if they had not known them they could not have succeeded. *Insurrection must rely upon the vacillations in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute.*<sup>43</sup> But this insight has not replaced *the mighty burst of creative enthusiasm, the unlimited creative powers of the real heroes,*<sup>44</sup> which are carried on the banners of revolutionary organizations to this day. If the project of revolutionary organizations is to remain viable, revolutionary leaders must erase the illusions of the classics from the banners and replace them with a slogan that describes the real conditions for the successful seizure of State power: *We want the socialist revolution with people as they are now, with people who cannot dispense with subordination, control and managers.*<sup>45</sup>

People who cannot dispense with managers after the managers have been sprung into the air are people who carry their managers within themselves, people who have internalized the officials. People who cannot dispense with control after the physical and intellectual police forces have been sprung into the air are people who have dried up their imaginations, stunted their own self-powers, people who, lacking the possibility, lost the ability to decide and move on their own. People who

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43 Lenin, see footnote 12.

44 Lenin and Mao, see footnotes 4 and 5.

45 Lenin, *State and Revolution* (1918), in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 303.

cannot dispense with subordination after *the whole superincumbent strata of official society have been sprung into the air*<sup>46</sup> are human beings who do not consider themselves full human beings, who see themselves through the eyes of their 'superiors' as inferior, as subordinates, as slaves. For people as they are now, the absence of subordination, control and managers creates fear, anxiety, despair and desperation, *it creates that most painful thing on earth, vacillation* – and these are precisely the real conditions for the successful seizure of State power, for it is precisely when *the people are close to desperation* that *Our victory is assured*.<sup>47</sup>

The preliminary condition for the rise of revolutionary leaders is not the independence which dispenses with the need for subordination, control and managers, but the dependence which cannot dispense with them.

The precondition for the seizure of State power is the mass psychology of dependence. The need for revolutionary organizations and leadership arises, not from self-confidence created by independent activity, but from adaptation to dependence. This need arises when an individual internalizes the superincumbent strata of official society, when an individual adapts to socially created conditions of material scarcity, when an individual submits to social relations of subordination. And the need for leadership is the greater the more the individual derives positive enjoyment from the internalizations, the adaptations, the submission. The conditions for the success of revolutionary organizations exist only during the brief moment after the population has expropriated the ruling classes, but when the population has not yet actively appropriated the productive forces, when the active appropriation of the productive forces has not yet conquered the mass psychology of dependence, the anxiety, the fear, the desperation which is the sign for the leader's battle-cry: *Our victory is assured!*

The mass psychology of dependence – *people who cannot dispense with subordination, control and managers* – this is the real condition for the seizure of power by a revolutionary organization. Although this condition results from the various ways people adapt to the dominant

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46 Marx and Engels, see footnote 26.

47 Lenin, see footnotes 26 and 12.

social order, in normal times it cannot easily be distinguished from the routines of daily life. The mass psychology of dependence becomes visible when an extraordinary event suspends or disrupts its normal reproduction, because at such moments it gives rise to fear, anxiety and desperation.

When the guards suddenly disappear, but when people have not exercised their freedom, what strikes fear into their hearts? What drives them to the point of desperation? What causes *that most painful thing on earth, vacillation, which wears the people out*?<sup>48</sup>

During the course of normal times, one had to rise at a given hour, to be at a given place at a given time, in order to survive. And on then survival was not assured. Even people who did as they were told were constantly being removed, excluded, deprived. One lost all desires except one: not to be deprived. One lost all projects except one: to rise at the given hour so as to be at the given place, at the given time. This project had become one's entire habit structure, one's personality. And one day when one is there, at the given place, the given hour – and the guard doesn't come, and continues not to come – is it the end? Fear grips one's heart; the daily anxiety one had learned to accept as a normal part of life gives way to desperation; one cannot dispense with the subordination, the control.

If one could not suppress all of one's desires, if one wanted more than the common lot, where could one get more if not from the others? One had to learn the fears of this one, the weaknesses of another; one had to learn ways to protect the weak, ways to alleviate fears – and to charge for one's services. One even had to create obstacles and hardships so as to be paid for alleviating them. One was called a cheat, a thief, an impostor – but what did it matter? One's lot was incomparably better, one's meals incomparably richer. One who was a cheat or a thief was better off; the designations became titles. Can all this suddenly end? Wouldn't this sudden collapse put one's whole being in question? If one can no longer have more, how can one be more than the common lot? No one wants people as they are now.

One had no self. One had a given place in the line, and that was all. Yet how one longed to be someone, how one longed to be recognized as

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48    Lenin, see footnote 39.

someone, as more than a place in a line! And how could one earn this recognition, how could one become someone, except by submitting to tasks no one else submitted to? One was called a traitor, a scab – by whom? By self-less nobodies, by those who were nothing more than places in the line. One became indifferent to their tags, their insults. What mattered was how one was seen by those outside, how one was rewarded by the Authorities. What mattered was that one had become someone; one had gained recognition and self-esteem. What mattered was that one had become an extension of the Authorities, one had become superior to the others, the inferiors; one was no longer a self-less shadow; one's self glowed in the light reflected by the Authorities; one learned to appreciate one's self through the eyes of the Authorities. All this was absolutely necessary: how could one have survived without recognition, without some affirmation of one's importance? One couldn't; one's adaptation was, after all, only human. And after one has effaced oneself so successfully, after one has internalized the Authorities so thoroughly that nothing else remains inside one, how can one believe even for an instant that the authorities have disappeared? One cannot stomach such a possibility. Could it mean that one has ceased to be what one is, that one has disappeared? Are the others suddenly one's equals – and has one, after all, been nothing more than a scab? It is not vacillation that wears one out. It is hysteria. No, one cannot dispense with subordination.

[. . .]

Why, then, does classical revolutionary theory describe precisely the opposite as the condition for the seizure of State power? If the condition is dependence, why does classical theory point to independence? This seems like a paradox only if it is thought that the classical revolutionary theory is a single, unitary theory of revolution. The paradox disappears as soon as it is understood that the classical theory contains two separate and distinct theories of revolution. One is a theory of the class structure of capitalism and the conditions for its overthrow, the other is a theory of revolutionary organization and the conditions for its seizure of power. The two events are distinct; their necessary conditions are distinct. Paradox and confusion have been created by the historical treatment of one event as if it were the other, and by the treat-

ment of the necessary conditions for one event as if they were necessary conditions for the other. Classical revolutionary theory does in fact contain a very precise description of the necessary conditions for the seizure of State power, a description which pinpoints the mass psychology of dependence as the necessary condition. But this description is couched in the language of the other theory, in the language of independence, and as a result the true import and content of this description have been obscured.

The theory of the class structure of capitalist society is not a theory of revolutionary organization. It is a theory which defines social classes, not in terms of their relation to a revolutionary organization, but in terms of their relation to society's means of production. One class is characterized by its subordination to the other, a subordination which takes the form of alienation of all decision-making powers. The other class is characterized by its control over the first, a control which takes the form of direction and management of all of society's activities. It is only in the frame of reference of this theory that the destruction of the dependence relation itself is the preliminary condition for revolution. *A revolution can be successfully carried out only if the majority of the working population engage in independent creative activity as makers of history.*<sup>49</sup> Independent creative activity by the majority of the working population is the necessary as well as the sufficient condition for the overthrow of the class structure of capitalism because *the proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.*<sup>50</sup>

On the other hand, the theory of revolutionary organization is not a theory of class structure. In the frame of reference of this theory, the destruction of dependence relations is not a condition for the seizure of State power by the revolutionary organization. We have already shown that the seizure of State power cannot be successfully carried out if the majority of the working population engage in independent creative activity as makers of history. We have also shown that the seizure of State power can be successfully carried out only if the majority of the

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49 Lenin, see footnote 6.

50 Marx and Engels, see footnote 26.

working population do not engage in independent creative activity as makers of history, only if dependence relations – subordination, control and, management – remain intact. We will now show that the classical revolutionary theory contains a very precise description of the conditions for the successful seizure of power by revolutionary organizations, and that the identification of these conditions with independent creative activity is historically unfounded.

The classical theory which defines the real conditions for the revolutionary organization's seizure of power is not the theory of class structure but the theory of class consciousness. This is a theory which defines the revolutionary class, not in terms of its relation to society's means of production, but in terms of its relation to the revolutionary organization. According to the theory of class consciousness, individuals or social classes are revolutionary if they adhere to revolutionary ideas, to revolutionary thought, to revolutionary ideology, to the program of the revolutionary organization.

The theory of class consciousness and the theory of class structure do not have the same frame of reference. This is obscured by the fact that one theory borrows language from the other, and thus refers linguistically to the same frame of reference. But except for terminological similarities, the two theories have nothing in common. Both theories refer to the working class, the proletariat, as the revolutionary class – but the same terms do not in reality refer to the same subjects in the two theories. Those who are revolutionary according to one theory are not necessarily proletarians according to the other, and those who are proletarians according to the second theory are not necessarily revolutionary according to the first.

According to the theory of class consciousness, individuals can be considered class conscious revolutionaries even if they would not be classified as proletarians by the theory of class structure, namely in terms of their relation to society's means of production. In fact, the most class conscious of revolutionaries, the leaders of the revolutionary organization, *the representatives of revolutionary proletarian internationalism who have embodied in their policy the idea that is motivating countless working people all over the world*,<sup>51</sup> would not be defined as

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51 Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder (1920) in *Selected Works*,

proletarians by the theory of class structure. These class conscious revolutionaries have been *educated representatives of the propertied classes, intellectuals; by their social status they belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia*.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, *the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop... nothing more nor less than consciousness in an embryonic form*.<sup>53</sup> In other words, according to the theory of class consciousness, those who are conscious revolutionaries are not only themselves not members of the working class, but the working class itself cannot become fully conscious. In fact, in the theory of class consciousness, the relation of individuals to the means of production is completely irrelevant. With the theory of consciousness it is possible to characterize *the proletariat* as *actually becoming more and more bourgeois*,<sup>54</sup> as *prisoners of bourgeois ideology*, and even as having *deserted to the bourgeoisie*.<sup>55</sup> Such characterizations would be meaningless in the theory of class structure, since in the frame of reference of this theory a *proletariat* that *had deserted to the bourgeoisie* could only have done so by appropriating the means of production, an event that cannot take place *without the whole superincumbent strata being sprung into the air*.<sup>56</sup>

According to the theory of consciousness, whether or not an individual or a class is revolutionary depends on the presence or absence of revolutionary consciousness in that individual or class. At first glance this appears to be a form of idealism. However, this appearance is only another result of the confusion between the theory of class structure and the theory of consciousness. It is only in appearance that the theory of consciousness maintains that revolution grows out of ideas in people's heads. This appearance is created by using the word 'revolution' in the place of 'seizure of State power,' and the appearance is magnified into a hallucination by an intentional association of the word

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Vol. III, p. 355.

52 Lenin, What is to be Done? (1902) in *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 122.

53 *Ibid.*, p.122 and p.121.

54 Engels, Letter to Marx (October 7, 1858), in Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 110.

55 M. Nicolaus in *Guardian*, June 13, 1970, p. 15 referring to Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1917) in *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 683 and p. 760; "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder (1920) in *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 356.

56 Marx and Engels, see footnote 26.



‘revolution’ with the *independent creative activity*<sup>57</sup> described by the other theory. It is only because of this intentional confusion that a bizarre sequence of *non-sequiturs* parades as a set of axioms ideally suited for slogans, viz. that the thoughts of the organization’s leader in people’s heads make them revolutionary, therefore also independent and creative, and that as the level of these thoughts rises, the dominant social order falls. These propositions are axioms for people who are willing and able to believe them, and belief in these propositions is in fact a sign that the believer possesses a relatively high level of consciousness. However, the theory of class consciousness has been primarily an instrument for the seizure of State power by revolutionary leaders, and only secondarily a set of articles of faith. It is the primary function of the theory that concerns us here. The primary function of the theory of consciousness has been to define for aspiring leaders the real conditions for the seizure of State power, and in defining these real conditions the theory of class consciousness has been idealistic only in appearance.

As an analysis of the conditions for the seizure of power by revolutionary leaders, the theory of class consciousness is no more idealistic than the theory of class structure. Both theories are equally materialistic. Both theories are equally about social relations. But they are not about the same social relations. The theory of class structure is about the relations between capitalists and laborers, about the conditions for the overthrow of these relations. The theory of class consciousness is about the relations between an organization and a mass, about the conditions for the organization’s seizure of power over the mass.

The theory of class consciousness defines people in terms of their thoughts instead of their practice, in terms of their ideology instead of their social relations, only in appearance. It does not define them in terms of the social relations described by the theory of class structure. But it defines them in terms of social relations nevertheless. To define social classes in terms of their ideas would require reading the minds of countless individuals; mind-reading is not in fact the method by which the class conscious are defined. In reality, the presence or absence of class consciousness is determined by the practice of an individual or a

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57 Lenin, see footnote 6.

class; it is determined by the presence or absence of specific social relations. The level of an individual's consciousness is measurable, not by the number of correct revolutionary thoughts which show on the individual's forehead, but by the extent to which the individual is a follower of the organization, by the real, concrete activity of attending meetings and demonstrations, carrying out assignments, obeying orders. The more regularly the individual attends organization meetings and events, the more unflinchingly the individual carries out assignments, the more unquestioningly the individual obeys orders, the higher the individual's level of consciousness. The level of consciousness of a social class is measurable, not by the number of revolutionary thoughts protruding from heads, but by the number of individuals of the class who are Party members, by the extent to which the members of a class adhere to the revolutionary organization.

Class consciousness may be an attribute of an individual or a social class. It refers to the presence or absence of ideas. But its presence or absence can only be determined by the social practice of the individual or class, by the presence or absence of concrete social relations. These social relations are specific relations between an individual and a revolutionary organization, and between a class and a revolutionary organization. The individuals who have the highest level of consciousness, the *representatives of proletarian internationalism*, the leaders, are not themselves members of the revolutionary class but are *educated representatives of the propertied classes*.<sup>58</sup> The class itself is *able to develop nothing more than consciousness in an embryonic form*.<sup>59</sup> The class depends on the leaders for its level of consciousness, its revolutionary essence, which in practice means that the revolutionary essence of the working class depends on the extent to which workers submit to the will of leaders.

The social relations behind class consciousness are social relations between leaders and followers, social relations of subordination and control. They are dependence relations. What is meant by class conscious masses is people who submit to the will of a revolutionary

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58 Lenin, Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power? (1917), in *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 355.

59 Lenin, see footnote 53.

leader, people who cannot dispense with subordination, control and managers. Class consciousness is a euphemism for the mass psychology of dependence.

[. . .]

The revolutionary potential of the oppressed, as defined by the theory of class consciousness, is directly proportional to their level of dependence. The more people are subordinated and controlled, and the less they can dispense with subordination and control, the higher their revolutionary potential. This is why *the people in countries oppressed by imperialism* have been a virtual cornucopia for revolutionary leaders. Submission to revolutionary leaders has made the oppressed the vanguard of the proletariat. And the leaders who have built power out of the ghettos, power out of the “native” quarters, power out of the frustrations and resentments, power out of the killings – leaders who, according to the same theory of class consciousness, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia – have been the vanguard of the vanguard.

*The situation of the people in countries oppressed by imperialism* has been the historical field out of which revolutionary organizations and leaders built power. This is the field which contained the necessary as well as the sufficient conditions for the seizure of State power by revolutionary organizations. Modern revolutionary theory treats the oppressed as potential revolutionaries by definition. The oppressed become conscious revolutionaries when their actions increase the power of the revolutionary Party. Those whose actions hamper the Party are by definition privileged. And those who superficially seem to be oppressed, but whose practice gives no evidence of revolutionary consciousness, are defined as lackeys of imperialism. On the basis of this elementary, simple and clear definition of the social classes in the modern world, it has been possible to define the fundamental contradiction of modern capitalism as the conflict between oppressed and oppressor nations. Within oppressor nations, aspiring revolutionary leaders have focused their attention on people who could, in one or another respect, be plausibly treated as an oppressed nation.

Oppressed nations are the revolutionary proletariat in modern revolutionary theory. They are oppressed, not because they reproduce the

dominant productive forces of the ruling social order, but to the extent that they do not. They are potential revolutionaries, not because their daily activity requires independent creative acts which burst the bounds of the dominant social order, but because it does not. The proletariat of modern revolutionary theory is not located at the heart of capitalism, but at its margins. The oppressed are revolutionary proletarians, not in terms of their relation to the dominant productive forces of capitalism, but in terms of their relation to the dominant revolutionary organizations. The material situation of the oppressed is one which is expected to make them disciplined and obedient followers. It is a material situation whose known consequence has not been independent and creative decision-making, but the mass psychology of dependence. It is a situation characterized, not by the omnipresence of the productive forces which are estranged by producers in the social form of Capital, but by the general absence of such productive forces. It is the situation of people who do not yet fully engage in modern forms of social activity, who do not yet wield the dominant forms of social power represented by money and State offices. The revolutionary potential of the oppressed lies in the willingness to support, at least passively, the struggle for power of a social class whose known historical role has been to spread the modern forms of reproducing Capital. This revolutionary potential cannot take the form of independent creative activity in conditions where the material basis for the independence and creativity possible to contemporary human beings is largely missing. The revolutionary potential takes the form of a desire for the amenities available to human beings in fully developed capitalist regions. The oppressed, who do not themselves produce such amenities, imagine these products, not as products of labor, but as products of the social form of the developed capitalist regions. The oppressed are under the impression that it is the social form that creates these amenities. And it is precisely this social form that the revolutionary organization is able to provide.

The theory of the fundamental contradiction of modern capitalism, also known as the theory of imperialism, is the clearest and most succinct statement of the modern theory of revolutionary leadership. This theory adapts the classical theory of social classes to the require-

ments of modern revolutionary leaders. The classical theory had dealt with a system of social relations through which one individual, a producer, systematically alienated productive activity, while another individual, a capitalist, systematically appropriated the alienated activity as well as all its products. Whether or not the producer and the exploiter spoke the same language was not relevant in the classical theory, although in general they did. On the other hand, the modern theory of the fundamental contradiction does not deal with social relations among the individuals of a society, but with international relations, with relations between countries. The adaptation of the classical theory to the needs of revolutionary leaders begins by shifting the frame of reference: *In order to understand the relations between classes within a given country, it is necessary to understand also the relationship of that country to other countries within the entire production sphere. An analysis of class relations requires an analysis of international relations.*<sup>60</sup> The analysis of international relations leads to the discovery that, unlike the *privileged bourgeois proletariat* of oppressor nations which alienates its labor to capitalists who speak the same language, the oppressed alienate their labor to foreign capitalists. As a result, economic development, namely the process of accumulation of Capital, does not take place in the oppressed nations; it is exported to oppressor nations. The solution to this fundamental contradiction is national liberation. The nation is liberated when its resources and productive forces are nationalized, when the nation's productive activity is appropriated and directed by the Party of National Liberation and the National Leader. The modern theory stands the classical theory on its head. According to the modern theory, the fundamental contradiction, the central illness of the oppressed, is not capitalism; it is the absence of national capitalism. What ails the oppressed is the absence of modern forms of *subordination, control and managers*.<sup>61</sup> The fundamental crisis of the oppressed is the crisis of leadership. The fundamental question for the oppressed is the question of State power. The illness of the oppressed is diagnosed in such a way that the cure is self-evident. The cure is modern forms of

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60 M. Nicolaus in *Guardian*, June 13, 1970, p. 15. Lenin, see footnote 52.

61 Lenin, see footnote 6.

*subordination, control and managers.* The cure is the national leader at the helm of the State.

It has long been known that a very large number of the human beings who sacrifice their limbs and their lives to national liberation struggles, the populations who make up the *mass base* of the liberation army, sacrifice themselves to achieve *the self government of the producers*,<sup>62</sup> to *engage in independent creative activity as makers of history*.<sup>63</sup> When national leaders seize State power, these populations are rewarded with the prevailing modern forms of *self-government* and *independence*. Self-government takes the form of government by rulers who speak the national language. Independence takes the form of National Independence, government by the National Leader.

As a result of the seizure of State power by a revolutionary leader, populations who struggle for independent creative activity by self-governed producers achieve *a socialist society governed by a dictatorship of the proletariat led by the Workers' Party which follows a unitary ideology composed exclusively of the ideas of the party secretary-general based on the creative application of Marxism-Leninism*.<sup>64</sup> As a result of the seizure of State power, the leader personifies all the resources, all the productive forces and all the activity of the society. Personifications of social activity animate the world. Estranged power of community – the State – is experienced as the only real community. Estranged productive power – Capital – is experienced as the only real productive agent. The leader personifies the entirety of social Capital. *Whatever we have, all we have built, is entirely owing to the correct leadership of comrade party secretary general. The Premier's ideas form the basis for what we call the unitary ideology espoused by the Workers' Party. Unitary ideology means there are no contending ideologies. The unitary ideology of the system of the party means the adoption, as the sole guiding principle, of the revolutionary ideas of comrade party secretary general, founder and leader of the party and great leader of the revolution. The leader founds and leads the party which is the vanguard of the working class and the general staff of the revolution. He is the supreme brain of*

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62 Marx, see footnote 17.

63 Lenin, see footnote 6.

64 J. and T. Smith, "Korea Today" in *Guardian*, September 5, 1970, p. 13.

*the class and the heart of the party who puts forward the guiding ideas of the party as well as the strategy and tactics of the revolution. He is the center of the unity and solidarity of the working class and the entire revolutionary masses. There is no center except him. It is an indispensable need in leading socialism and communism to a final triumph to resolutely defend the leader of the revolution and form a steel-like ring around him to strictly protect and carry out his revolutionary ideas.*<sup>65</sup>

The historical achievement of revolutionary leaders who seized power has been to liberate the nation's raw materials and the nation's labor force from the imperialists, namely foreign capitalists, in order to launch an epoch of primitive accumulation of Capital by the State. The oppressed who were mobilized into the *mass base* that put the vanguard in power have served as the sources of the accumulated Capital. The social relations which accompanied this process had to be social relations which responded to the historical task of primitive accumulation of Capital. The historical achievement of successful revolutionary leaders has been to *organize large scale production on the basis of what capitalism has already created, establishing strict, iron discipline backed up by the state power of the armed workers.*<sup>66</sup> Anti-imperialist revolution has been the modern means for launching and completing the accumulation of Capital in regions which had been left stranded by the main historical trend. The historical mission of socialist revolutions has been to complete the dominant social order in space and in depth.

The historical realization of economic development, namely accumulation of Capital, involves the transfer of surplus labor from agrarian to industrial regions, from productive classes to exempted classes. It entails the unequal development of geographic and social sectors; the social and economic development of some at the expense of others. The accumulation of Capital requires and thus gives rise to social relations which lubricate and enforce it. These social relations have taken the historical form of the State, commodity production and the division of labor.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Lenin, *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* (1918) in *Selected Works*, Vol II, p.675.

Because the accumulation of Capital began in Western Europe, and its initial agency appeared in the form of a commercial bourgeoisie, apologists for this class credited the accumulation of Capital to the institutions and ideas of this specific class. It was thought that Capital depended on entrepreneurial merchants attached to democratic political forms, an anti-religious ideology of science and enlightenment, and a social program of universal literacy. However, the launching of the primitive accumulation of Capital in Japan after 1868 demonstrated that the process could dispense with the West European bourgeoisie and with its liberal-democratic ideology. Japanese industrialization demonstrated that the social relations required for the primitive accumulation of Capital are a strong State, universal commodity production, and the division of labor. The remaining institutions and ideas of the West European bourgeoisie were not requirements of Capital accumulation; they reflected the peculiar historical origins of the European bourgeoisie. Japanese industrialization demonstrated that democratic political forms were not a requirement of Capital accumulation but a reflection of the bourgeoisie's struggle against feudalism. Japanese industrialization demonstrated that the anti-religious scientific ideology of the West European bourgeoisie was not a requirement of Capital accumulation but a reflection of the bourgeoisie's struggle against the anti-commercial ideology of the Catholic Church. Japanese industrialization demonstrated that the bourgeois program of universal literacy and humanist education was not a requirement of Capital accumulation but a reflection of the bourgeoisie's struggle against the obscurantism of Christianity. The fact is that the West European bourgeoisie itself abandoned its own initial institutions and ideas because they hampered the accumulation of Capital. Democracy undermined the authority of the State, and so the bourgeoisie detached the democratic forms from the exercise of sovereignty and reduced them to socially harmless rituals. The anti-religious ideology of science and enlightenment hampered commodity production by removing the moral justification for the sacrifice of an individual's productive life to the service of a higher community, so the bourgeoisie resurrected religion. Universal literacy undermined the division of labor by making all branches of human knowledge available to all, so the bourgeoisie transformed



literacy into an instrument for the mass production of historically unprecedented forms of ignorance.

The Bolshevik seizure of State power in 1917 confirmed the lessons learned from the Japanese restoration of the centralized State in 1868. The accumulation of Capital can dispense with the institutions and ideas of the West European bourgeoisie; what is required is the State, commodity production and the division of labor. Bourgeois democratic forms no longer hamper the authority of the State even as rituals; they have been replaced by a State which represents and embodies the entire population. The anti-religious ideology no longer hampers commodity production; labor is once again a painful sacrifice suffered for the glory of a higher community. Universal literacy no longer undermines the division of labor; it has become an instrument for inculcating reverence for the State, belief in the official ideology, and *iron discipline while at work*.

The historical accomplishment of seizures of State power by revolutionary organizations has been to spread the relations of Capital accumulation to regions where these relations were underdeveloped. This historical accomplishment has been carried out without the ideology of the West European bourgeoisie. The West European bourgeoisie had initiated the primitive accumulation of Capital with an ideology that reflected the historical origin of this class. Revolutionary organizations that seize power initiate the primitive accumulation of Capital with an ideology that reflects the historical origin of modern revolutionary organizations. Modern revolutionary ideology does not borrow its language from the West European bourgeoisie but from the West European working class. This ideology refers to the historical practice of primitive accumulation of Capital with the language of socialism. The language of socialism did not originate in regions where the social relations of Capital accumulation were underdeveloped. It originated in regions where the relations of Capital accumulation were most highly developed. The language of socialism originally expressed a total rejection of the social relations of Capital accumulation. It originally expressed an unmitigated opposition to *subordination, control and managers, to iron discipline and unquestioning obedience*.<sup>67</sup> It was not

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<sup>67</sup> Lenin, see footnotes 66, 45.

originally a theory of the seizure of power by revolutionary leaders. Its original frame of reference was unambiguous: *Let it come to an end at last, this great scandal that our posterity will never believe! Disappear at last, revolting distinctions between rich and poor, great and small, masters and servants, governors and governed.*<sup>68</sup> In the frame of reference of the original language of socialism, the social relations of Capital accumulation stunt the capacities of individuals. The universal reappropriation of every individual's capacities is therefore the *sine qua non* for socialism. The word socialism does not originally refer to a state of affairs; it is a negation of the prevailing state of affairs. The word socialism is originally a synonym for what never before existed. It is originally a synonym for the unrealized potentialities of society's productive forces, a synonym for the undeveloped capacities of human beings. It is originally a synonym for the overthrow of the social order that blocks the potentialities and stunts the capacities. It is originally a synonym for the universal development of human capacities to the level made possible by the productive forces.

Seizures of State power were achieved by revolutionary leaders in conditions characterized by a low level of development of productive forces. The historical role of the revolutionary States was to develop the productive forces by instituting relations of Capital accumulation. The unrealized potentialities of the productive forces that were realized were potentialities that had not been realized locally. The seizure of State power paved the way for the universal development of the capacities of the State to the level made possible by contemporary productive forces.

The bourgeois program of democracy, enlightenment and universal literacy did not become completely serviceable to the bourgeoisie's historical task until it was emptied of its original content and transformed into an ideology of Capital accumulation and State power. The socialist program inherited by modern revolutionary leaders speaks of workers' democracy, appropriation of productive activity by each, development of universal capacities – namely of the abolition of the State, commodity production, and the division of labor. This program is even less serviceable to the social relations established by the seizure of

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68 Manifesto of Equals (1796) in *Socialist Thought, A Documentary History*, edited by Fried and Sanders, Garden City: Anchor Books, 1964, p. 53.

State power than the bourgeois program. But the socialist language could not be rejected because it is only this language that makes the seizure of power by revolutionary leaders *a revolutionary alternative in the heart of the empire*.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the language of socialism had to be completely emptied of its original content to be transformed into an ideology of Capital accumulation and State power. The transformation of socialist language into a vehicle for communicating the accumulation of Capital and the seizure of State power has been the major feat of modern revolutionary leaders. In the transformed language, the State, which had originally been a synonym for the alienation of community, becomes a synonym for the community. Commodity production, originally a synonym for alienated productive activity, becomes a synonym for the construction of socialism. The division of labor, originally a synonym for the alienation of universal human capacities, becomes a synonym for the realization of human capacities, and the specialist becomes the new socialist man.

The unique historical feat of V.I. Lenin was not to seize State power; this had been done before. Lenin's historical feat was to describe his seizure of State power with the language of a socialist movement determined to destroy the State. The application of Lenin's ideas to Lenin's practice is the foundation for modern revolutionary ideology. For aspiring leaders armed with revolutionary ideas, the revolutionary ideology provides a vision of the social power historically achieved by leaders armed with revolutionary ideas. For individuals who are removed from contact with modern productive forces by the division of labor, whose only developed capacities are their revolutionary ideas, the revolutionary ideology provides a vision of total self-realization.

[...]

The historical accomplishment of revolutionary organizations has been to launch the primitive accumulation of Capital in regions where this development had been stunted. But the working classes of industrially developed regions already completed this historical task, under the leadership of an earlier form of revolutionary vanguard. The social relations created by Dictatorships of the Proletariat have been the modern State, developed commodity production and a sophisticated division of

69 G. Calvert and C. Nieman in *Guardian*, June 29, 1968, p. 20.

labor. But these are precisely the social relations that hamper and repress the further development of the industrial working class. In short, the possibility of the failure of modern socialism in the field where socialism originated – among industrial workers – is created by the historical development of socialism and of the industrial working class. At its origin socialism was a common ground, a means of discourse, for all individuals who alienate their productive activity. To the extent that slaves have a language distinct from the language of their masters, socialism was the language of those who simultaneously created and were enslaved by the State, commodity production and the division of labor. The historical accomplishment of successful revolutionary leaders has been to put the language of socialism at the service of the State, commodity production and the division of labor. This historical accomplishment makes it extremely difficult to re-introduce to the working class which had given birth to it, not socialism in its 19th century form of a struggle for the reappropriation of self-powers, but socialism in its historically successful form of an ideology of leadership. In conditions of developed productive forces, revolutionary leaders confront a working class which no longer needs the State, commodity production and the division of labor. It is to these workers that revolutionary leaders propose their program of State power, iron discipline and unquestioning obedience. And of course the leaders quickly discover that this *privileged* working class, this *aristocracy of labor*, this *bourgeois proletariat* has *deserted to the bourgeoisie*. These *prisoners of bourgeois ideology*<sup>70</sup> do not embrace the revolutionary program as a daring and imaginative vision of the future; they regard it as a nightmare of the past.

In the perspective of modern revolutionary theory, the crisis of the developed proletariat is a crisis of leadership. The crisis does not reside in the extent to which workers capitulate to the prevailing conditions of production. The crisis resides in the extent to which their failure to capitulate dispenses with revolutionary organizations. The crisis resides in the fact that these workers move without the ideology, leadership and historical experience of the revolutionary vanguard. The ferment of this developed working class is not revolutionary because it lacks revo-

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70 Engels, Lenin, Nicolaus, see footnotes 54 and 55.

lutionary consciousness; it does not take the form of mass conversion to the ideology of a revolutionary leader. It takes the form of acts rendered possible by the development of the productive forces, and a growing failure to perform acts rendered unnecessary by the level of development of the productive forces. The ferment takes the form of absenteeism, sabotage, wildcat strikes, occupations of productive plants, and even attempts to dismantle the entire social order. It takes the form of a growing resistance to State power, a growing refusal to alienate productive activity, a growing rejection of specialization. For aspiring leaders, the crisis resides in the fact that this ferment is not a response to revolutionary ideology or leadership, but to the historical level of development of society's productive forces.

The crisis of revolutionary leadership is a result of the major historical developments of this century. While revolutionary leaders were realizing their historical accomplishments, the working class that had been considered the gravedigger of capitalism continued to dig. While revolutionary rulers were adapting the language of this class to the needs of a State about to embark on the primitive accumulation of Capital, the working class continued to create the productive forces which eliminated the need for the social relations of Capital accumulation. While revolutionary leaders continued to enlarge the sphere of State power, the working class continued to remove the historical basis of State power. As a result, the one-time vehicle for the accumulation of Capital has played out its historic role. The social relations which once lubricated the development of society's productive forces enter their period of decline. Their sole historic role becomes to reproduce themselves, a role which they increasingly perform by hampering the further development of the productive forces. The once-dynamic agents of electrification, mechanization, industrialization become a historical anomaly. The accelerated transformation of all the material conditions of life slows down to the point when mainly the names of the dynasties and the dates of the wars change. The Age of Progress flattens out into an Egyptian millennium. The lubricant turns to sand. The one-time agent becomes a fetter.

The Pharaonic dynasties declined for three thousand years. But aspiring leaders should not interpret this fact with unwarranted opti-

mism. It does not mean that the social conditions required for the establishment of revolutionary leadership will continue to be available for three thousand years. Unlike the Pharaonic dynasties, the ruling classes of the period of Capital accumulation sit on a dynamo which their own historical activity brought into being. This dynamo constantly threatens to cut short their period of decline. The dynamo consists of individuals who are in daily contact with the constantly changing productive forces; individuals who are expected to be simultaneously automatic and imaginative, simultaneously obedient and creative. Unlike aspiring Pharaohs, aspiring modern leaders cannot count on these workers to continue to alienate their productive powers to Capital and their power of community to the State for the next 3000 years. The duration of the Egyptian decline is only one historical instance; it does not provide a basis for certainty. Frozen history, death in life, may only be the mask of modern society, and not its real face. The mask is all that is visible because the vision of the ruling class is in every epoch the ruling vision. But there are unmistakable signs of ferment and agitation just below the still mask. Unlike the peasants of ancient Egypt, modern workers have much to gain from the appropriation of society's productive forces.

The historical consequences of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat can only be realized in conditions where these consequences have not yet been realized. This is why the seizure of State power has succeeded mainly among people who had been deprived of the dominant historical reality of the capitalist epoch. This is why the ideology of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, of growth rates of national income, of the new Socialist Man, has appealed only to *people in countries oppressed by imperialism*.<sup>71</sup> The ideology was accepted because it was understood to refer to the modern State, commodity production and the division of labor. The rule of the vanguard party was not understood as an end in itself but as a means toward the full realization of the dominant historical reality of the capitalist epoch. The revolutionary organization offered people deprived of the amenities of modern social life the prospect of becoming professors, factory managers and policemen.

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71 Nicolaus, see footnote 60.

However, in conditions where the material consequences of capitalist social relations have already been realized, revolutionary leaders with portfolios to State offices have been hard put to point to any material consequences of their victory other than their rule. The less people need social relations instrumental to the accumulation of Capital, the more must leaders create a consciousness which regards the seizure of State power by revolutionary leaders as a good in itself. In such conditions it becomes a major feat for revolutionary leaders to maintain the conviction that the conscious vanguard of the proletariat performs a critical service for the proletariat. This conviction can no longer be implanted in the proletariat itself, because of the erosive effects of the law of diminishing consciousness. This conviction nevertheless remains the cornerstone of the revolutionary ideology, since without it aspiring leaders would never subject themselves to the years of self-deprivation, to the sacrifice of desires and abilities, which their revolutionary profession demands. Without this conviction, the unquestioning devotion required by the ideology and the faithful service required by the organization would not be endured. But the conviction can no longer be communicated; one must neither lose it nor spread it; one must learn to keep it to oneself. A revolutionary leader who explicitly presented himself as the culmination, the apex, and the sole consequence of the proletariat's struggle for socialism, would not thereby increase his stature. In conditions of developed productive forces, the revolutionary ideology cannot be made to refer to any material consequences or historical social relations, because these consequences and relations are already past necessities and present fetters. The terms of the ideology must be made to refer only to other terms of the ideology: Revolution means Socialism, Socialism means Power, Power means Revolution. The terms of the ideology must be presented as abstract truths, as parts of the Idea. Only then can the coup of a *Left-Leaning General* be presented as a victory of the *workers' movement*. The *General* is no longer to be considered the representative, or even the consciousness, of the *workers' movement*. The *General* believes in the IDEA of the *workers' movement*,<sup>72</sup> and the *General's* coup is therefore the victory of the IDEA. Thus it becomes possible for the idea of the workers' move-

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72 R. Ward in *Guardian*, October 17, 1970, p. 11.

ment to seize State power without the workers themselves moving. In fact, this becomes the last possibility for revolutionary leaders in conditions where the workers will not move within the path historically experienced by the world socialist movement, the path to the seizure of State power. In such conditions, the independent movement of the working class, no matter how broad its sweep, no longer has interest for revolutionary leaders except as an illustration of failure. Such independent movement fails before it begins because the *independence* is above all independence from the idea of the seizure of State power, the central idea and experience of the world socialist movement. The Idea cannot be victorious if those struggling do not believe in it.

Revolutionary leaders who seize power in conditions of developed productive forces have to emphasize solely the idea of socialism, because in such conditions the seizure of State power can have no material consequences other than the rule of the idea. In order to lay the ground for the seizure of State power in conditions of developed productive forces, revolutionary organizers have to raise the consciousness of the revolutionary masses to a recognition of the Leader as the carrier of the idea. It was already true in *countries oppressed by imperialism*,<sup>73</sup> it is even more true in countries not oppressed by imperialism that *Ideology is the key to revolution and socialist construction* and that *the Leader is key to ideology*.<sup>74</sup> The consciousness of an already industrialized proletariat cannot be stimulated by the example of an industrialized nation. It has to be raised to an acceptance of the thought of the Leader *per se*. To an even greater extent than any people in countries oppressed by imperialism, working people who themselves create contemporary productive forces are made to accept the revolutionary proposition that *Whatever we have, all we have built, is entirely owing to the correct leadership of the Leader*.<sup>75</sup> This consciousness is raised by propaganda before the revolution, and by more powerful means after the seizure of State power. Universal acceptance of this proposition is equivalent to National Liberation. Revolutionary leaders who successfully seized State power in conditions of developed productive forces

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73 Nicolaus, see footnote 60.

74 J. and T. Smith, "Korea Today" in *Guardian*, September 5, 1970, pp. 3-4.

75 J. and T. Smith, see footnote 74, Nicolaus, see footnote 60.



were the first to define the key struggle of the contemporary era as the struggle for national liberation, National liberation is the only form of liberation that can be realized by means of the seizure of State power. It was also these revolutionary leaders who first defined the fundamental contradiction of modern capitalism as the conflict between oppressed and oppressor nations. This is the only contradiction of modern capitalism that is resolved as soon as a revolutionary leader seizes the State apparatus.

In conditions of developed productive forces, the material consequences of the seizure of State power in *countries oppressed by imperialism* have to be simulated. The key historical accomplishment of the world socialist movement, the primitive accumulation of Capital, does not have a real context in conditions where primitive accumulation has already been carried out. This context has to be ideologically created. It is the function of revolutionary nationalist ideology to create the context for a second primitive accumulation of Capital. *The question of fundamental importance to the revolution is: Who are our friends and who are our enemies?*<sup>76</sup> Oppressor nations, namely inhabitants of other countries, are the enemy, and therefore the source of primitive accumulation. Once the nation's enemies are defined, the question of fundamental importance is answered and the revolutionary program is launched. At this point it becomes necessary for revolutionary leaders to abandon the pacifism of the industrial working class whose socialist language is still being borrowed. Wars of national liberation are the sole means to national liberation. War is the only efficient instrument for liberation from oppressor nations. War is the only effective way to transform the inhabitants of other countries into sources of primitive accumulation. Consequently, the central institution required for the realization of national liberation is the national liberation army. The comradeship of those who kill together and the solidarity of those who die together replace the flabby petit-bourgeois pacifism of the industrial proletariat. A morality based on iron discipline, unquestioning obedience and boundless sacrifice replaces the *petty bourgeois atmosphere which permeates and corrupts the Proletariat and causes constant relapses among the proletariat into petty-bourgeois spinelessness,*

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76 Mao, *Citations of President Mao Tse-Toung*, p. 14

*disunity, individualism, and alternate moods of exaltation and dejection. The strictest centralization and discipline are required within the political party of the proletariat in order to counteract this. Without an iron party tempered in the struggle, without a party capable of watching and influencing the mood of the masses, it is impossible to conduct such a struggle successfully.*<sup>77</sup> The construction of a large proletarian army and a powerful socialist police, the waging of a permanent war of national liberation, and the liquidation of countless counter-revolutionaries who did not serve the people, have been the key historical accomplishments of revolutionary socialist nationalism in power. However, the seizures of power in conditions of developed productive forces have not made the repetition of this feat easier for modern revolutionary leaders. They have not counteracted the erosive effects of the law of diminishing revolutionary consciousness.

None of the forms of conscious revolutionary activity devised so far seem able to counteract the effects of the law of diminishing consciousness. In its ferment, the developed proletariat deprives itself of the direction provided by revolutionary leadership, it dispenses with the discipline provided by revolutionary organizations, and it lacks the consciousness provided by revolutionary ideology. Because of this lack of guidance, the developed proletariat fails to distinguish between its imperialist enemies and its anti-imperialist friends. If it is hostile to the discipline of capitalist production, it is equally hostile to the labor discipline required for the Construction of Socialism. If it is hostile to the authority of the capitalist State, it is equally hostile to the authority of the Socialist State. This undirected proletariat struts indifferently across the distinctions provided by revolutionary consciousness. When it takes steps to abolish capitalist commodity production, it increasingly turns first of all against its own conscious vanguard. Aspiring revolutionary leaders are left no choice but to define this proletariat as privileged, bourgeois, aristocratic, and therefore in its essence counter-revolutionary. The gulf between the developed proletariat and its conscious vanguard continues to widen. The more extensive and well known the historical accomplishments of revolutionary vanguards, the more the

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77 Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder, in *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 357.

spontaneous activity of the proletariat is anarchic, carnivalous, undisciplined and undirected. Not only does the proletariat become increasingly deprived of the guidance of revolutionary leadership; the revolutionary vanguard becomes increasingly isolated from the proletariat. Those who respond to the social possibilities of the contemporary productive forces are not drawn to revolutionary organizations. Those who are drawn to revolutionary organizations are not drawn there by the possibilities of the productive forces. The two seem to stand on opposite sides of a historical watershed. They almost seem to live in different epochs. Where the one sees the possibility for enjoyment the other sees the necessity for sacrifice. Where the one sees the chance for play the other sees the need for discipline. Where the one experiments with the unknown, the other applies the tried and tested. Where the one develops self-powers, the other develops estranged powers. Where the one looks forward toward the *self government of the producers*,<sup>78</sup> *creating a democracy on their own, in their own way*,<sup>79</sup> the other looks backward toward a *socialist society governed by a dictatorship of the proletariat led by the Worker's Party which follows a unitary ideology composed exclusively of the ideas of the Leader*.

The orders of the left become the last refuge for those who seek order, discipline, coherent ideology, and guidance. Only the organizations of the left are able to provide understanding in an increasingly anarchic situation. Only the organizations of the left are able to make sense of the growing chaos. *Ideology is the key*.<sup>80</sup> The organizations of the left become the last refuge for those who would be lost without the conviction that *in modern civilized countries classes are led by political parties; that political parties are directed 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*.<sup>81</sup> *The leader founds and leads the party which is the vanguard of the working class and the general staff of the revolution. He is the supreme brain of the class and the heart of the party. He is the center of*

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78 Marx, see footnote 18.

79 Lenin, see footnote 17.

80 J. and T. Smith, see footnote 74.

81 Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism – An Infantile Disorder (1920) in *Selected Works*, Vol. III, pp. 354-355.

*the working class. There is no center except him.*<sup>82</sup> *All this is elementary. All this is simple and clear. Why replace this with some rigmarole?*<sup>83</sup> Instead of replacing all this by some rigmarole, it is necessary to *form a steel-like ring around the leader to strictly protect and carry out his revolutionary ideas.*<sup>84</sup> It is necessary to protect and nourish every head in which the thought of the leader takes root. Only by such means can the organizations of the left continue to serve the revolution, serve history and serve the people. Activity which nourishes and spreads the thought of the leader lays the foundation for a truly representative democracy in which each individual is able to participate in at least a fragment of the power personified by the leader. In a pre-revolutionary situation, such activity could take on the form of selling the thoughts of leaders for a small profit margin. This would make the revolutionary ideology available at low prices, and at the same time would provide an income for the revolutionary organizers spreading the ideology. The path to the seizure of State power would then be paved by small entrepreneurs. In a period of agitation and ferment such activity serves the people and responds directly to their needs. The ferment itself provides inspirations for products as well as a market for revolutionary ideas. If the ferment becomes an on-going and normal part of daily life, the revolutionary entrepreneurs could easily establish powerful and influential institutions devoted to the *unitary ideology composed exclusively of the ideas of the Leader*. But if the ferment becomes independent activity, or if it subsides, the revolutionary organizers are likely to become discouraged with the minuteness of the accomplishment compared to the greatness of the task.

In a situation where *the historical experience of the revolutionary socialist movement* is not what anyone wants, serving the people revolutionary ideology is not a small task. It is a Gargantuan enterprise. It requires force as well as propaganda. The task of knocking capitalist ideas out of people's heads requires a propaganda apparatus larger than the capitalist academic community and more efficient than the capitalist advertising industry. It requires security measures which cut off

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82 J. and T. Smith, see footnote 74.

83 Lenin, see footnote 51.

84 J. and T. Smith, see footnote 74.

counter-revolutionary anti-leadership ideas before they spread. The question of fundamental importance to revolutionary leaders is not only to define the real friends and the real enemies, but also to weed out the real enemies. Defining the real enemies is the function of the revolutionary ideology. Weeding them out is the function of guardians of the revolutionary ideology. The real enemies of revolutionary vanguards are powerful and widespread. They spread with the continuing development of the productive forces. They are in every plant, in every office, in every neighborhood. Revolutionary guardians confront them in every meeting of every group. The real enemies of revolutionary vanguards are independent workers. Their independence, their rejection of revolutionary leadership, sows the seeds of anarchy. Their rejection of revolutionary discipline creates chaos in every office and department of the revolutionary establishment. *Their demands are not new to the guardians. A number of previous workers had also called for general undifferentiation of job function, abolition of serious professional technical work, the abolition of the political probation period prior to becoming a voting member of the staff, the abolition of centralized direction of production. Some have wanted to abolish any form of leadership, or 'hierarchy' in their terms, altogether. The guardians have discussed these and similar demands, usually grouped by their advocates under the rubric of 'workers' control and internal democracy' and have democratically – at times unanimously – rejected them.*<sup>85</sup> The real enemies of the revolutionary vanguard are all those who reject the modern State, universal commodity production and the progressive division of labor. They are contemporary producers who reject capitalist supervision, control and managers. Their opposition to the historical accomplishments of capitalism is not new. Producers struggled against the constraints of capitalism during its entire development. In fact, craftsmen, artisans and peasants resisted the very rise of capitalism. Thus revolutionary guardians classify the contemporary enemies of capitalism together with all historical opponents of capitalism, and define the contemporary producers as *petit-bourgeois craftsmen, artisans and peasants*.<sup>86</sup> The task of modern revolutionary ideology is to

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85 C. Davidson in *Guardian*, April 25, 1970, p. 7.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

identify all opposition to capitalism with pre-capitalist opposition to capitalism. From the standpoint of pre-capitalist social forms, capitalism is progressive, and all opposition to it is *reactionary, petit-bourgeois, anarcho-syndicalist, and petty capitalist*<sup>87</sup> at the same time. The real enemies of the revolutionary vanguard are all the present and past enemies of capitalism. The real potential for human liberation, the revolutionary vision of the future, is found by looking to capitalism. The task of the revolutionary guardians, who are today known as Marxist-Leninists or simply as Marxists, is to weed out *the political ideas of workers' self-management and control, decentralism and local autonomy, opposition to the division of labor and all forms of hierarchy. Their expression has been an undercurrent within and without working class and socialist movements from the beginnings 150 to 200 years ago, but were particularly widespread, in a variety of forms, during the earlier stages of capitalist development. This is the clue to the class character of these trends, which Marxists have described as the reaction of petit-bourgeois craftsmen, artisans and peasants to the reorganization and growth of manufacturing at the beginning of the industrial revolution. In this sense, the demand for 'workers' control' or 'self-management' of this or that factory or workshop meant, in essence, 'give us back the ownership of our tools.' The demand for local autonomy' meant a return to the exclusiveness of the guilds or the self-contained isolation of the rural village. Opposition to the division of labor implied a return to the equality of the guilds where each individual did similar but separate work. Combined with this was the opposition to all hierarchies, a reaction to the social organization and supervision in the individual factory. As for the state, the attitude was similar to that of all petty capitalists: the less of it – and its taxes and trade regulations – the better. This hankering for the return of the old order now superceded by modern industry is why Marxists use the terms 'reactionary' and 'petit bourgeois' to characterize anarcho-syndicalism. The real potential for human liberation is found by looking to the future, not the past.*<sup>88</sup> The past only contains *reactionary and petit-bourgeois* opposition to capitalism, whereas what the future holds in store is liberation in the form of the modern State, universal

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87 *Ibid.*

88 C. Davidson in *Guardian*, April 25, 1970, p. 8.

commodity production, the progressive division of labor, all forms of hierarchy, and the prevailing contemporary forms of supervision, control and managers.

All the living individuals who refuse to subordinate themselves, and all the past individuals who refused to subordinate themselves to the dominant social authorities of the capitalist epoch are the real enemies of the Party of the Proletariat, and therefore, since the language of socialism is still being borrowed, they are all agents of the bourgeoisie. *Whoever weakens ever so little the iron discipline of the party of the proletariat (especially during the time of its dictatorship) actually aids the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.*<sup>89</sup> *Within the party, there must be no one lagging behind when an order is given by the leadership to 'march forward,' no one turning right when the order is left.*<sup>90</sup> *The strictest centralization and discipline are required within the political party of the proletariat in order to counteract this.*<sup>91</sup> In order to weed the real enemies of the proletariat out of the organization, in order to be sure that no one is lagging behind when an order is given by the leader, a political probation period needs to be instituted. Only after this probation period can an aspiring leader become a member of the staff. If this probation period is to be at all effective, revolutionary organizations need to equip themselves with modern instruments for measuring the iron discipline and unquestioning obedience of an applicant. In order to administer the probation, it is necessary to strap the aspiring member to an appropriately wired chair. The leader administers the probation from another room. The leader reads a question into a microphone and hears the aspirant's answer over a speaker. In response to the appropriate question, the aspirant must answer *Ideology is the key to revolution and socialist construction.*<sup>92</sup> The answer cannot merely contain this thought. It must be stated in these words. Any alteration in the phrasing is an indication of *petit bourgeois individualism.*<sup>93</sup> *To deviate from socialist Ideology in the slightest degree means strength-*

89 Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder, in *Selected Works*, Vol. III, p. 357.

90 J. and T. Smith, "Korea Today," in *Guardian*, September 5, 1970, p. 4.

91 Lenin, see footnote 89.

92 J. and T. Smith, see footnote 90.

93 Lenin, see footnote 98.

ening bourgeois ideology.<sup>94</sup> All this is elementary. When the correct answer is *The Leader is key to ideology*,<sup>95</sup> the aspirant deviates fatally by using 'Dictator' or 'Ruler' in the place of 'Leader.' In front of the probator is a panel of buttons. Labels identify the amount of voltage administered to the aspirant by each button. The panel goes as high as 450 volts, and buttons corresponding to the highest voltages are marked 'caution, severe pain.' These higher voltages are only applied on *petit-bourgeois individualists*<sup>96</sup> who refuse to answer *Whatever we have, all we have built, is entirely owing to the correct leadership of the Leader*.<sup>97</sup> Only individuals who answer this question correctly are able to become instruments or media through whom the powers of the leader can be exercised. The office of the leader becomes legitimate only when the authority of the office and its occupant is internalized by all staff members. Only individuals who accept the legitimacy of the office can become voting members of the staff.

Unfortunately, even the strictest political probation period may fail to weed out the real enemies of the revolutionary organization. Individuals who accepted the thought of the leader during the probation period may deviate from it later. To be sure that no one deviates in the slightest degree, it might be necessary to keep the organization's membership down to five or six members. If the members of a small, closed vanguard do not engage in any practical activity, they can keep constant watch on each other. Furthermore, a miniature International whose members engage exclusively in thought can achieve the coherence required to embrace the entire world revolutionary movement. The basis for membership in such a revolutionary organization would be to appropriate, commit to memory, and on suitable occasions proclaim the thought of the most coherent member. If the appropriation of the coherence of the critique is the basis for membership, the miniature International is able to re-enact the great historical moments of the large Internationals. If the members learn to regard their membership as the only alternative to historical oblivion, all the powers

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94 Lenin, What is to be Done? (1902) in *Selected Works*, Vol. I, p. 130.

95 J. and T. Smith, see footnote 90.

96 Lenin, see footnote 98.

97 J. and T. Smith, see footnote 74.



of the great parties of the proletariat can be wielded on a very small scale. Even the Dictatorship of the Proletariat can be re-enacted in miniature, with purges of the incoherent, public confessions of errors, recantations of critiques of the critique, generous reinstatements, and even occasional mass expulsions of two or three members.

But if the organization consists of more than six members, and aspires to grow even larger, nothing can prevent the proliferation of enemies of revolutionary leadership short of a powerful and efficient security apparatus. In favorable circumstances this apparatus would take the form of a militia, a secret police, an army, or preferably all three combined. But we have seen that in conditions of developed productive forces, circumstances are not so favorable. Consequently other alternatives must be found. Revolutionary leaders of other countries command large liberation armies. Organizers can implant anti-imperialist consciousness among the workers by offering them the prospect of invasion from abroad. The people must be served, one way or the other. The historical situation does not leave room for flabby and sentimental alternatives. The central task of revolutionary leaders in conditions of developed productive forces is to liquidate the enemies of the proletariat's leaders. To this end, leaders must concentrate their attention on problems of security.

If revolutionary leaders are unable to serve the people with their own security forces, they will have no choice but to turn to the available security forces. There may be no other way to deal with *the petit-bourgeois atmosphere that encircles the proletariat on every side. The strictest centralization and discipline are required in order to counteract this.*<sup>98</sup> The required centralization and discipline are such that only the armed forces are really adequate for the task. *While modern capitalism is highly organized within a given factory or industry, the relations between capitalists are characterized by the social anarchy of production. With the possible exception of the armed forces and some public utilities, the imperialist economy and state are neither centralized nor planned.*<sup>99</sup> Those presently in control of the State apparatus do not adequately

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98 Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism—An Infantile Disorder, in *Selected Works*, Vol III, p. 357.

99 Davidson, see footnote 85.

perform the specific office of the State, which is to use all available means to ensure that the power of community remains estranged. They perform this function only inside the walls of factories, in some public utilities and in the armed forces. The aim of revolutionary leaders is to extend centralization and planning to the society at large, to merge the estranged power of producers with the estranged power of community. Only then would the State directly determine the shape of the environment in which human beings live and the activities in which they engage. This is why *the working class must win political power by smashing the imperialist bureaucratized state apparatus, establish the social ownership of the productive forces and carry out centralized planning with a vengeance through a new state of its own based on the armed power of the people.*<sup>100</sup> The armed power of the people, namely the armed forces, will of course remain intact since they were already adequately disciplined and centralized before the working class smashed and seized the State apparatus. In the meantime, in order to protect the revolutionary establishment at this late historical hour, revolutionary leaders would be well advised to turn to the last available instruments which can serve their ends: the armed forces and the police. Military power is the key to revolution and socialist construction in a situation where every attempt of individuals to realize their self-powers to the level made possible by contemporary productive forces is a threat to the existence of the entire revolutionary establishment. A revolutionary leader *should therefore have no other aim or thought, nor take up any other thing for his study, but war and its organization and discipline, for that is the only art that is necessary to one who commands. The chief cause of the loss of states is the contempt for this art. He ought, therefore, never to let his thoughts stray from the exercise of war; and in peace he ought to practice it more than in war, which he can do in two ways: by action and by study. As to exercise for the mind, the revolutionary leader ought to read history and study the actions of eminent men, see how they acted in warfare, examine the causes of their victories and defeats in order to imitate the former and avoid the latter.*<sup>101</sup> Only by

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100 Davidson paraphrasing Lenin, *State and Revolution* (1918), in *Selected Works*, Vol. II, p. 303. Davidson (in *Guardian*, April 25, 1970, p. 7) replaces “centralized planning” for Lenin’s “strict iron discipline.”

101 Machiavelli, *The Prince*, New York: Modern Library, 1950, pp 53-55.

such means can the historical experience of the revolutionary socialist movement continue to spread across the world.



## **PART FOUR:**

# **CRITIQUE OF NATIONALISM**

## The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism

This essay first appeared in the December 1984 edition of *Fifth Estate* a response to the persistent nationalistic tendencies within leftism.

Nationalism was proclaimed dead several times during the present century:

- after the first world war, when the last empires of Europe, the Austrian and the Turkish, were broken up into self-determined nations, and no deprived nationalists remained, except the Zionists;
- after the Bolshevik coup d'état, when it was said that the bourgeoisie's struggles for self-determination were henceforth superseded by struggles of workingmen, who had no country;
- after the military defeat of Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany, when the genocidal corollaries of nationalism had been exhibited for all to see, when it was thought that nationalism as creed and as practice was permanently discredited.

Yet forty years after the military defeat of Fascists and National Socialists, we can see that nationalism did not only survive but was born again, underwent a revival. Nationalism has been revived not only by the so-called right, but also and primarily by the so-called left. After the national socialist war, nationalism ceased to be confined to conservatives, became the creed and practice of revolutionaries, and proved itself to be the only revolutionary creed that actually worked.

Leftist or revolutionary nationalists insist that their nationalism has nothing in common with the nationalism of fascists and national socialists, that theirs is a nationalism of the oppressed, that it offers personal as well as cultural liberation. The claims of the revolutionary nationalists have been broadcast to the world by the two oldest continuing hierarchic institutions surviving into our times: the Chinese State and, more recently, the Catholic Church. Currently nationalism is being

touted as a strategy, science and theology of liberation, as a fulfillment of the Enlightenment's dictum that knowledge is power, as a proven answer to the question "What Is to be Done?"

To challenge these claims, and to see them in a context, I have to ask what nationalism is – not only the new revolutionary nationalism but also the old conservative one. I cannot start by defining the term, because nationalism is not a word with a static definition: it is a term that covers a sequence of different historical experiences. I'll start by giving a brief sketch of some of those experiences.

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According to a common (and manipulable) misconception, imperialism is relatively recent, consists of the colonization of the entire world, and is the last stage of capitalism. This diagnosis points to a specific cure: nationalism is offered as the antidote to imperialism: wars of national liberation are said to break up the capitalist empire.

This diagnosis serves a purpose, but it does not describe any event or situation. We come closer to the truth when we stand this conception on its head and say that imperialism was the first stage of capitalism, that the world was subsequently colonized by nation-states, and that nationalism is the dominant, the current, and (hopefully) the last stage of capitalism. The facts of the case were not discovered yesterday; they are as familiar as the misconception that denies them.

It has been convenient, for various good reasons, to forget that, until recent centuries, the dominant powers of Eurasia were not nation-states but empires. A Celestial Empire ruled by the Ming dynasty, an Islamic Empire ruled by the Ottoman dynasty and a Catholic Empire ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty vied with each other for possession of the known world. Of the three, the Catholics were not the first imperialists but the last. The Celestial Empire of the Mings ruled over most of eastern Asia and had dispatched vast commercial fleets overseas a century before sea-borne Catholics invaded Mexico.

The celebrants of the Catholic feat forget that, between 1420 and 1430, Chinese imperial bureaucrat Cheng Ho commanded naval expeditions of 70,000 men and sailed, not only to nearby Malaya, Indonesia

and Ceylon, but as far from home ports as the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and Africa. The celebrants of Catholic conquistadors also belittle the imperial feats of the Ottomans, who conquered all but the westernmost provinces of the former Roman Empire, ruled over North Africa, Arabia, the Middle East and half of Europe, controlled the Mediterranean and hammered on the gates of Vienna. The imperial Catholics set out westward, beyond the boundaries of the known world, in order to escape from encirclement.

Nevertheless, it was the imperial Catholics who “discovered America,” and their genocidal destruction and plunder of their “discovery” changed the balance of forces among Eurasia’s empires.

Would imperial Chinese or Turks have been less lethal had they “discovered America”? All three empires regarded aliens as less than human and therefore as legitimate prey. The Chinese considered others barbarians; the Muslims and Catholics considered others unbelievers. The term unbeliever is not as brutal as the term barbarian, since an unbeliever ceases to be legitimate prey and becomes a full-fledged human being by the simple act of converting to the true faith, whereas a barbarian remains prey until she or he is made over by the civilizer.

The term unbeliever, and the morality behind it, conflicted with the practice of the Catholic invaders. The contradiction between professions and acts was spotted by a very early critic, a priest called Las Casas, who noted that the conversion ceremonies were pretexts for separating and exterminating the unconverted, and that the converts themselves were not treated as fellow Catholics but as slaves.

The critiques of Las Casas did little more than embarrass the Catholic Church and Emperor. Laws were passed and investigators were dispatched, but to little effect, because the two aims of the Catholic expeditions, conversion and plunder, were contradictory. Most churchmen reconciled themselves to saving the gold and damning the souls. The Catholic Emperor increasingly depended on the plundered wealth to pay for the imperial household, army, and for the fleets that carried the plunder.

Plunder continued to take precedence over conversion, but the Catholics continued to be embarrassed. Their ideology was not altogether suited to their practice. The Catholics made much of their



conquests of Aztecs and Incas, whom they described as empires with institutions similar to those of the Hapsburg Empire and the religious practices as demonic as those of the official enemy, the heathen empire of the Ottoman Turks. But the Catholics did not make much of the wars of extermination against communities that had neither emperors nor standing armies. Such feats, although perpetrated regularly, conflicted with the ideology and were less than heroic.

The contradiction between the invaders' professions and their acts was not resolved by the imperial Catholics. It was resolved by harbingers of a new social form, the nation-state. Two harbingers appeared during the same year, 1561, when one of the Emperor's overseas adventures proclaimed his independence from the empire, and several of the Emperor's bankers and provisioners launched a war of independence.

The overseas adventurer, Lope de Aguirre, failed to mobilize support and was executed.

The Emperor's bankers and provisioners mobilized the inhabitants of several imperial provinces and succeeded in severing the provinces from the empire (provinces which were later called Holland).

These two events were not yet struggles of national liberation. They were harbingers of things to come. They were also reminders of things past. In the bygone Roman Empire, Praetorian guards had been engaged to protect the Emperor; the guards had assumed ever more of the Emperor's functions and had eventually wielded the imperial power instead of the Emperor. In the Arabic Islamic Empire, the Caliph had engaged Turkish bodyguards to protect his person; the Turkish guards, like the earlier Praetorians, had assumed ever more of the Caliph's functions and had eventually taken over the imperial palace as well as the imperial office.

Lope de Aguirre and the Dutch grandees were not the Hapsburg monarch's bodyguards, but the Andean colonial adventurer and the Dutch commercial and financial houses did wield important imperial functions. These rebels, like the earlier Roman and Turkish guards, wanted to free themselves of the spiritual indignity and material burden of serving the Emperor; they already wielded the Emperor's powers; the Emperor was nothing more to them than a parasite.

Colonial adventurer Aguirre was apparently inept as a rebel; his time had not yet come.

The Dutch grandees were not inept, and their time had come. They did not overthrow the empire; they rationalized it. The Dutch commercial and financial houses already possessed much of the New World's wealth; they had received it as payment for provisioning the Emperor's fleets, armies and household. They now set out to plunder colonies in their own name and for their own benefit, unshackled by a parasitic overlord. And since they were not Catholics but Calvinist Protestants, they were not embarrassed by any contradiction between professions and acts. They made no profession of saving souls. Their Calvinism told them that an inscrutable God had saved or damned all souls at the beginning of Time and no Dutch priest could alter God's plan.

The Dutch were not crusaders; they confined themselves to unheroic, humorless, and businesslike plunder, calculated and regularized; the plundering fleets departed and returned on schedule. The fact that the plundered aliens were unbelievers became less important than the fact that they were not Dutchmen.

West Eurasian forerunners of nationalism coined the term savages. This term was a synonym for the east Eurasian Celestial Empire's term barbarians. Both terms designated human beings as legitimate prey.

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During the following two centuries, the invasions, subjugations and expropriations initiated by the Hapsburgs were imitated by other European royal houses.

Seen through the lenses of nationalist historians, the initial colonizers as well as their later imitators look like nations: Spain, Holland, England, France. But seen from a vantage point in the past, the colonizing powers are Hapsburgs, Tudors, Stuarts, Bourbons, Oranges – namely dynasties identical to the dynastic families that had been feuding for wealth and power ever since the fall of the western Roman empire. The invaders can be seen from both vantage points because a transition was taking place. The entities were no longer mere feudal estates, but they were not yet full-fledged nations; they already

possessed some, but not yet all, the attributes of a nation-state. The most notable missing element was the national army. Tudors and Bourbons already manipulated the Englishness or Frenchness of their subjects, especially during wars against another monarch's subjects. But neither Scots and Irishmen, nor Corsicans and Provençals, were recruited to fight and die for "the love of their country." War was an onerous feudal burden, a *corvée*; the only patriots were patriots of Eldorado.

The tenets of what was going to become the nationalist creed did not appeal to the ruling dynasts, who clung to their own tried and tested tenets. The new tenets appealed to the dynast's higher servants, his money-lenders, spice-vendors, military suppliers and colony-plunderers. These people, like Lope de Aguirre and the Dutch *grandeers*, like earlier Roman and Turkish guards, wielded key functions yet remained servants. Many if not most of them burned to shake off the indignity and the burden, to rid themselves of the parasitic overlord, to carry on the exploitation of countrymen and the plunder of colonials in their own name and for their own benefit.

Later known as the bourgeoisie or the middle class, these people had become rich and powerful since the days of the first westward-bound fleets. A portion of their wealth had come from the plundered colonies, as payment for the services they had sold to the Emperor; this sum of wealth would later be called a primitive accumulation of capital. Another portion of their wealth had come from the plunder of their own local countrymen and neighbors by a method later known as capitalism; the method was not altogether new, but it became very widespread after the middle classes got their hands on the New World's silver and gold.

These middle classes wielded important powers, but they were not yet experienced in wielding the central political power. In England they overthrew a monarch and proclaimed a commonwealth but, fearing that the popular energies they had mobilized against the upper class could turn against the middle class, they soon restored another monarch of the same dynastic house.

Nationalism did not really come into its own until the late 1700s when two explosions, thirteen years apart, reversed the relative

standing of the two upper classes and permanently changed the political geography of the globe. In 1776, colonial merchants and adventurers re-enacted Aguirre's feat of proclaiming their independence from the ruling overseas dynast, outdid their predecessor by mobilizing their fellow-settlers, and succeeded in severing themselves from the Hanoverian British Empire. And in 1789, enlightened merchants and scribes outdid their Dutch forerunners by mobilizing, not a few outlying provinces, but the entire subject population, by overthrowing and slaying the ruling Bourbon monarch, and by remaking all feudal bonds into national bonds. These two events marked the end of an era. Henceforth even the surviving dynasts hastily or gradually became nationalists, and the remaining royal estates took on ever more of the attributes of nation-states.

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The two eighteenth century revolutions were very different, and they contributed different and even conflicting elements to the creed and practice of nationalism. I do not intend to analyze these events here, but only to remind the reader of some of the elements.

Both rebellions successfully broke the bonds of fealty to a monarchic house, and both ended with the establishment of capitalist nation-states, but between the first act and the last they had little in common. The main animators of both revolts were familiar with the rationalistic doctrines of the Enlightenment, but the self-styled Americans confined themselves to political problems, largely to the problem of establishing a state machinery that could take up where King George left off. Many of the French went much further; they posed the problem of restructuring not only the state but all of society; they challenged not only the bond of subject to monarch, but also the bond of slave to master, a bond that remained sacred to the Americans. Both groups were undoubtedly familiar with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's observation that human beings were born free, yet everywhere were bound in chains, but the French understood the chains more profoundly and made a greater effort to break them.

As influenced by rationalistic doctrines as Rousseau himself had been, French revolutionaries tried to apply social reason to the human environment in the same way that natural reason, or science, was starting to be applied to the natural environment. Rousseau had worked at his desk; he had tried to establish social justice on paper, by entrusting human affairs to an entity that embodied the general will. The revolutionaries agitated to establish social justice not only on paper, but in the midst of mobilized and armed human beings, many of them enraged, most of them poor.

Rousseau's abstract entity took the concrete form of a Committee of Public Safety (or Public Health), a police organization that considered itself the embodiment of the general will. The virtuous committee members conscientiously applied the findings of reason to human affairs. They considered themselves the nation's surgeons. They carved their personal obsessions into society by means of the state's razor blade.

The application of science to the environment took the form of systematic terror. The instrument of Reason and Justice was the guillotine.

The Terror decapitated the former rulers and then turned on the revolutionaries.

Fear stimulated a reaction that swept away the Terror as well as the Justice. The mobilized energy of bloodthirsty patriots was sent abroad, to impose enlightenment on foreigners by force, to expand the nation into an empire. The provisioning of national armies was far more lucrative than the provisioning of feudal armies ever had been, and former revolutionaries became rich and powerful members of the middle class, which was now the top class, the ruling class. The terror as well as the wars bequeathed a fateful legacy to the creed and practice of later nationalisms.

The legacy of the American revolution was of an altogether different kind. The Americans were less concerned with justice, more concerned with property.

The settler-invaders on the northern continent's eastern shore needed George of Hanover no more urgently than Lope de Aguirre had needed Philip of Hapsburg. Or rather, the rich and powerful among the

settlers needed King George's apparatus to protect their wealth, but not to gain it. If they could organize a repressive apparatus on their own, they would not need King George at all.

Confident of their ability to launch an apparatus of their own, the colonial slave-holders, land-speculators, produce-exporters and bankers found the King's taxes and acts intolerable. The most intolerable of the King's acts was the act that temporarily banned unauthorized incursions into the lands of the continent's original inhabitants; the King's advisers had their eyes on the animal furs supplied by indigenous hunters; the revolutionary land-speculators had theirs on the hunters' lands.

Unlike Aguirre, the federated colonizers of the north succeeded in establishing their own independent repressive apparatus, and they did this by stirring up a minimum of cravings for justice; their aim was to overthrow the King's power, not their own. Rather than rely excessively on their less fortunate fellow-settlers or backwoods squatters, not to speak of their slaves, these revolutionaries relied on mercenaries and on indispensable aid from the Bourbon monarch who would be overthrown a few years later by more virtuous revolutionaries.

The North American colonizers broke the traditional bonds of fealty and feudal obligation but, unlike the French, they only gradually replaced the traditional bonds with bonds of patriotism and nationhood. They were not quite a nation; their reluctant mobilization of the colonial countryside had not fused them into one, and the multi-lingual, multi-cultural and socially divided underlying population resisted such a fusion. The new repressive apparatus was not tried and tested, and it did not command the undivided loyalty of the underlying population, which was not yet patriotic. Something else was needed. Slave-masters who had overthrown their king feared that their slaves could similarly overthrow the masters; the insurrection in Haiti made this fear less than hypothetical. And although they no longer feared being pushed into the sea by the continent's indigenous inhabitants, the traders and speculators worried about their ability to thrust further into the continent's interior.

The American settler-invaders had recourse to an instrument that was not, like the guillotine, a new invention, but that was just as lethal.

This instrument would later be called Racism, and it would become embedded in nationalist practice. Racism, like later products of practical Americans, was a pragmatic principle; its content was not important; what mattered was the fact that it worked.

Human beings were mobilized in terms of their lowest and most superficial common denominator, and they responded. People who had abandoned their villages and families, who were forgetting their languages and losing their cultures, who were all but depleted of their sociability, were manipulated into considering their skin color a substitute for all they had lost. They were made proud of something that was neither a personal feat nor even, like language, a personal acquisition. They were fused into a nation of white men. (White women and children existed only as scalped victims, as proofs of the bestiality of the hunted prey.) The extent of the depletion is revealed by the nonentities the white men shared with each other: white blood, white thoughts, and membership in a white race. Debtors, squatters and servants, as white men, had everything in common with bankers, land speculators and plantation owners, nothing in common with Redskins, Blackskins or Yellowskins. Fused by such a principle, they could also be mobilized by it, turned into white mobs. Lynch mobs, "Indian fighters."

Racism had initially been one among several methods of mobilizing colonial armies, and although it was exploited more fully in America than it ever had been before, it did not supplant the other methods but rather supplemented them. The victims of the invading pioneers were still described as unbelievers, as heathen. But the pioneers, like the earlier Dutch, were largely Protestant Christians, and they regarded heathenism as something to be punished, not remedied. The victims also continued to be designated as savages, cannibals and primitives, but these terms, too, ceased to be diagnoses of conditions that could be remedied, and tended to become synonyms of non-white, a condition that could not be remedied. Racism was an ideology perfectly suited to a practice of enslavement and extermination.

The lynch-mob approach, the ganging-up on victims defined as inferior, appealed to bullies whose humanity was stunted and who lacked any notion of fair play. But this approach did not appeal to everyone. American businessmen, part hustlers and part confidence men, always

had something for everyone. For the numerous Saint Georges with some notion of honor and great thirst for heroism, the enemy was depicted somewhat differently; for them there were nations as rich and powerful as their own in the transmontane woodlands and on the shores of the Great Lakes.

The celebrants of the heroic feats of imperial Spaniards had found empires in central Mexico and on top of the Andes. The celebrants of nationalist American heroes found nations; they transformed desperate resistances of anarchic villagers into international conspiracies master-minded by military archons such as General Pontiac and General Tecumseh; they peopled the woodlands with formidable national leaders, efficient general staffs, and armies of uncountable patriotic troops; they projected their own repressive structures into the unknown; they saw an exact copy of themselves, with all the colors reversed – something like a photographic negative. The enemy thus became an equal in terms of structure, power and aims. War against such an enemy was not only fair play; it was a dire necessity, a matter of life and death. The enemy's other attributes – the heathenism, the savagery, the cannibalism – made the tasks of expropriating, enslaving and exterminating all the more urgent, made these feats all the more heroic.

The repertory of the nationalist program was now more or less complete. This statement might baffle a reader who cannot yet see any “real nations” in the field. The United States was still a collection of multilingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural “ethnicities,” and the French nation had overflowed its boundaries and turned itself into a Napoleonic empire. The reader might be trying to apply a definition of a nation as an organized territory consisting of people who share a common language, religion and customs, or at least one of the three. Such a definition, clear, pat and static, is not a description of the phenomenon but an apology for it, a justification. The phenomenon was not a static definition but a dynamic process. The common language, religion and customs, like the white blood of the American colonizers, were mere pretexts, instruments for mobilizing armies. The culmination of the process was not an enshrinement of the commonalities, but a depletion, a total loss of language, religion and customs; the



inhabitants of a nation spoke the language of capital, worshipped on the altar of the state and confined their customs to those permitted by the national police.

Nationalism is the opposite of imperialism only in the realm of definitions. In practice, nationalism was a methodology for conducting the empire of capital.

The continual increase of capital, often referred to as material progress, economic development or industrialization, was the main activity of the middle classes, the so-called bourgeoisie, because capital was what they owned, it was their property; the upper classes owned estates.

The discovery of new worlds of wealth had enormously enriched these middle classes, but had also made them vulnerable. The kings and nobles who initially gathered the new world's plundered wealth resented losing all but a few trophies to their middle class merchants. This could not be helped. The wealth did not arrive in usable forms; the merchants supplied the king with things he could use, in exchange for the plundered treasures. Even so, monarchs who saw themselves grow poor while their merchants grew rich were not above using their armed retainers to plunder the wealthy merchants. Consequently the middle classes suffered continual injuries under the old regime – injuries to their property. The king's army and police were not reliable protectors of middle class property, and the powerful merchants, who already operated the business of the empire, took measures to put an end to the instability; they took the politics in hand as well. They could have hired private armies, and they often did. But as soon as instruments for mobilizing national armies and national police forces appeared on the horizon, the injured businessmen had recourse to them. The main virtue of a national armed force is that it guarantees that a patriotic servant will war alongside his own boss against an enemy boss's servant.

The stability assured by a national repressive apparatus gave the owners something like a hothouse in which their capital could grow, increase, multiply. The term "grow" and its corollaries come from the capitalists' own vocabulary. These people think of a unit of capital as a

grain or seed which they invest in fertile soil. In spring they see a plant grow from each seed. In summer they harvest so many seeds from each plant that, after paying for the soil, sunshine and rain, they still have more seeds than they had initially. The following year they enlarge their field, and gradually the whole countryside becomes improved. In reality, the initial “grains” are money; the sunshine and rain are the expended energies of laborers; the plants are factories, workshops and mines, the harvested fruits are commodities, bits of processed world; and the excess or additional grains, the profits, are emoluments which the capitalist keeps for himself instead of dividing them up among the workers.

The process as a whole consisted of the processing of natural substances into saleable items or commodities, and of the incarceration of wage workers in the processing plants.

The marriage of Capital with Science was responsible for the great leap forward into what we live in today. Pure scientists discovered the components into which the natural environment could be decomposed; investors placed their bets on the various methods of decomposition; applied scientists or managers saw to it that the wage workers in their charge carried the project through. Social scientists sought ways to make the workers less human, more efficient and machine-like. Thanks to science, capitalists were able to transform much of the natural environment into a processed world, an artifice, and to reduce most human beings into efficient tenders of the artifice.

The process of capitalist production was analyzed and criticized by many philosophers and poets, most notably by Karl Marx,<sup>1</sup> whose critiques animated, and continue to animate, militant social movements. Marx had a significant blind spot; most of his disciples, and many militants who were not his disciples, built their platforms on that blind spot. Marx was an enthusiastic supporter of the bourgeoisie’s struggle for liberation from feudal bonds. Who was not an enthusiast in those days? He, who observed that the ruling ideas of an epoch were the ideas of the ruling class, shared many of the ideas of the newly empowered middle class. He was an enthusiast of the Enlightenment, of ratio-

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1 The subtitle of the first volume of *Capital* is *A Critique of Political Economy: The Process of Capitalist Production* (published by Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1906; republished by Random House, New York).

nalism, of material progress. It was Marx who insightfully pointed out that every time a worker reproduced his labor power, every minute he devoted to his assigned task, he enlarged the material and social apparatus that dehumanized him. Yet the same Marx was an enthusiast for the application of science to production.

Marx made a thorough analysis of the production process as an exploitation of labor, but he made only cursory and reluctant comments about the prerequisite for capitalist production, and the initial capital that made the process possible.<sup>2</sup> Without the initial capital, there could have been no investments, no production, no great leap forward. This prerequisite was analyzed by the early Soviet Russian marxist Preobrazhensky, who borrowed several insights from the Polish marxist Rosa Luxemburg to formulate his theory of primitive accumulation.<sup>3</sup> By primitive, Preobrazhensky meant the basement of the capitalist edifice, the foundation, the prerequisite. This prerequisite cannot emerge from the capitalist production process itself, if that process is not yet under way. It must, and does, come from outside the production process. It comes from the plundered colonies. It comes from the expropriated and exterminated populations of the colonies. In earlier days, when there were no overseas colonies, the first capital, the prerequisite for capitalist production, had been squeezed out of internal colonies, out of plundered peasants whose lands were enclosed and crops requisitioned, out of expelled Jews and Muslims whose possessions were expropriated.

The primitive or preliminary accumulation of capital is not something that happened once, in the distant past, and never after. It is something that continues to accompany the capitalist production process, and is an integral part of it. The process described by Marx is responsible for the regular profits are periodically destroyed by crises endemic to the system; new injections of preliminary capital are the only known cure to the crises. Without an ongoing primitive accumulation of capital, the production process would stop; each crisis would tend to become permanent.

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2 In *Ibid.*, pp.784-850: Part VIII: "The So-Called Primitive Accumulation."

3 E. Preobrazhensky, *The New Economics* (Moscow, 1926; English translation published by Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965), a book which announced the fateful "law of primitive socialist accumulation."

Genocide, the rationally calculated extermination of human populations designated as legitimate prey, has not been an aberration in an otherwise peaceful march of progress. Genocide has been a prerequisite of that progress. This is why national armed forces were indispensable to the wielders of capital. These forces did not only protect the owners of capital from the insurrectionary wrath of their own exploited wage workers. These forces also captured the holy grail, the magic lantern, the preliminary capital, by battering the gates of resisting or unresisting outsiders, by looting, deporting and murdering.

The footprints of the national armies are the traces of the march of progress. These patriotic armies were, and still are, the seventh wonder of the world. In them, the wolf lay alongside the lamb, the spider alongside the fly. In them, exploited workers were the chums of exploiters, indebted peasants the chums of creditors, suckers the chums of hustlers in a companionship stimulated not by love but by hatred – hatred of potential sources of preliminary capital designated as unbelievers, savages, inferior races.

Human communities as variegated in their ways and beliefs as birds are in feathers were invaded, despoiled and at last exterminated beyond imagination's grasp. The clothes and artifact of the vanished communities were gathered up as trophies and displayed in museums as additional traces of the march of progress; the extinct beliefs and ways became the curiosities of yet another of the invaders' many sciences. The expropriated fields, forests and animals were garnered as bonanzas, as preliminary capital, as the precondition for the production process that was to turn the fields into farms, the trees into lumber, the animals into hats, the minerals into munitions, the human survivors into cheap labor. Genocide was, and still is, the precondition, the cornerstone and ground work of the military-industrial complexes, of the processed environments, of the worlds of offices and parking lots.

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Nationalism was so perfectly suited to its double task, the domestication of workers and the despoliation of aliens, that it appealed to

everyone – everyone, that is, who wielded or aspired to wield a portion of capital.

During the nineteenth century, especially during its second half, every owner of investable capital discovered that he had roots among the mobilizable countryfolk who spoke his mother's tongue and worshipped his father's gods. The fervor of such a nationalist was transparently cynical, since he was the countryman who no longer had roots among his mother's or father's kin: he found his salvation in his savings, prayed to his investments and spoke the language of cost accounting. But he had learned, from Americans and Frenchmen, that although he could not mobilize the countryfolk as loyal servants, clients and customers, he could mobilize them as loyal fellow-Catholics, Orthodox or Protestants. Languages, religions and customs became welding materials for the construction of nation-states.

The welding materials were means, not ends. The purpose of the national entities was not to develop languages, religions or customs, but to develop national economies, to turn the countryfolk into workers and soldiers, to turn the motherland into mines and factories, to turn dynastic estates into capitalist enterprises. Without the capital, there could be no munitions or supplies, no national army, no nation.

Savings and investments, market research and cost accounting, the obsessions of the rationalistic former middle classes, became the ruling obsessions. These rationalistic obsessions became not only sovereign but also exclusive. Individuals who enacted other obsessions, irrational ones, were put away in madhouses, asylums.

The nations usually were but need no longer have been monotheistic; the former god or gods had lost their importance except as welding materials. The nations were mono-obsessive, and if monotheism served the ruling obsession, then it too was mobilized.

World War I marked the end of one phase of the nationalizing process, the phase that had begun with the American and French revolutions, the phase that had been announced much earlier by the declaration of Aguirre and the revolt of the Dutch grandees. The conflicting claims of old and newly-constituted nations were in fact the causes of that war. Germany, Italy and Japan, as well as Greece, Serbia and colonial Latin America, had already taken on most of the attributes of their

nationalistic predecessors, had become national empires, monarchies and republics, and the more powerful of the new arrivals aspired to take on the main missing attribute, the colonial empire. During that war, all the mobilizable components of the two remaining dynastic empires, the Ottoman and the Hapsburg, constituted themselves into nations. When bourgeoisies with different languages and religions, such as Turks and Armenians, claimed the same territory, the weaker were treated like so-called American Indians; they were exterminated. National Sovereignty and Genocide were – and still are – corollaries.

Common language and religion appear to be corollaries of nationhood, but only because of an optical illusion. As welding materials, languages and religions were used when they served their purpose, discarded when they did not. Neither multi-lingual Switzerland nor multi-religious Yugoslavia were banned from the family of nations. The shapes of noses and the color of hair could also have been used to mobilize patriots – and later were. The shared heritages, roots and commonalities had to satisfy only one criterion, the criterion of American-style pragmatic reason: did they work? Whatever worked was used. The shared traits were important, not because of their cultural, historical or philosophical content, but because they were useful for organizing a police to protect the national property and for mobilizing an army to plunder the colonies.

Once a nation was constituted, human beings who lived on the national territory but did not possess the national traits could be transformed into internal colonies, namely into sources of preliminary capital. Without preliminary capital, no nation could become a great nation, and nations that aspired to greatness but lacked adequate overseas colonies could resort to plundering, exterminating and expropriating those of their countrymen who did not possess the national traits.

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The establishment of nation-states was greeted with euphoric enthusiasm by poets as well as peasants who thought their muses or their gods had at last descended to earth. The main wet blankets amidst the

waving banners and flying confetti were the former rulers, the colonized, and the disciples of Karl Marx.

The overthrown and the colonized were unenthusiastic for obvious reasons.

The disciples of Marx were unenthusiastic because they had learned from the master that national liberation meant national exploitation, that the national government was the executive committee of the national capitalist class, that the nation had nothing for workingmen but chains. These strategists for the workingmen, who were not themselves workingmen but were as bourgeois as the ruling capitalists, proclaimed that the workingmen had no country and organized themselves into an International. This International split into three, and each International moved increasingly into the field of Marx's blind spot.

The First International was carried off by Marx's one-time Russian translator and then antagonist Bakunin, an inveterate rebel who had been a fervent nationalist until he'd learned about exploitation from Marx. Bakunin and his companions, rebels against all authorities, also rebelled against the authority of Marx; they suspected Marx of trying to turn the International into a state as repressive as the feudal and national combined. Bakunin and his followers were unambiguous in their rejection of all states, but they were ambiguous about capitalist enterprise. Even more than Marx, they glorified science, celebrated material progress and hailed industrialization. Being rebels, they considered every fight a good fight, but the best of all was the fight against the bourgeoisie's former enemies, the fight against feudal landlords and the Catholic Church. Thus the Bakuninist International flourished in places like Spain, where the bourgeoisie had not completed its struggle for independence but had, instead, allied itself with feudal barons and the Church for protection from insurgent workers and peasants. The Bakuninists fought to complete the bourgeois revolution without and against the bourgeoisie. They called themselves anarchists and disdained all states, but did not begin to explain how they would procure the preliminary or the subsequent industry, progress and science, namely the capital, without an army and a police. They were never given a real chance to resolve their contradiction in practice, and

present day Bakuninists have still not resolved it, have not even become aware that there is a contradiction between anarchy and industry.

The Second International, less rebellious than the first, quickly came to terms with capital as well as the state. Solidly entrenched in Marx's blind spot, the professors of this organization did not become enmeshed in any Bakuninist contradiction. It was obvious to them that the exploitation and the plunder were necessary conditions for the material progress, and they realistically reconciled themselves to what could not be helped. All they asked for was a greater share of the benefits for the workingmen, and offices in the political establishment for themselves, as the workingmen's representatives. Like the good unionists who preceded and followed them, the socialist professors were embarrassed by "the colonial question," but their embarrassment, like Philip Hapsburg's, merely gave them bad consciences. In time, imperial German socialists, royal Danish socialists and republican French socialists even ceased to be internationalists.

The Third International did not only come to terms with capital and the state; it made them its goal. This international was not formed by rebellious or dissenting intellectuals; it was created by a state, the Russian state, after the Bolshevik Party installed itself in that state's offices. The main activity of this international was to advertise the feats of the revamped Russian state, of its ruling party, and of the party's founder, a man who called himself Lenin. The feats of that party and founder were indeed momentous, but the advertisers did their best to hide what was most momentous about them.

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The first world war had left two vast empires in a quandary. The Celestial Empire of China, the oldest continuous state in the world, and the Empire of the Tsars, a much more recent operation, hovered shakily between the prospect of turning themselves into nation-states and the prospect of decomposing into smaller units, like their Ottoman and Hapsburg counterparts had done.

Lenin resolved this quandary for Russia. Is such a thing possible? Marx had observed that a single individual could not change circum-



stances; he could only avail himself of them. Marx was probably right. Lenin's feat was not to change circumstances, but to avail himself of them in an extraordinary manner. The feat was monumental in its opportunism.

Lenin was a Russian bourgeois who cursed the weakness and ineptitude of the Russian bourgeoisie.<sup>4</sup> An enthusiast for capitalist development, an ardent admirer of American-style progress, he did not make common cause with those he cursed, but rather with their enemies, with the Anti-capitalist disciples of Marx. He availed himself of Marx's blind spot to transform Marx's critique of the capitalist production process into a manual for developing capital, a "how-to-do-it" guide. Marx's studies of exploitation and immiseration became food for the famished, a cornucopia, a virtual horn of plenty. American businessmen had already marketed urine as spring water, but no American confidence man had yet managed an inversion of such magnitude.

No circumstances were changed. Every step of the inversion was carried out with available circumstances, with tried and tested methods. Russian countryfolk could not be mobilized in terms of their Russian-ness or orthodoxy or whiteness, but they could be, and were, mobilized in terms of their exploitation, their oppression, their ages of suffering under the despotism of the Tsars. Oppression and exploitation became welding materials. The long sufferings under the Tsars were used in the same way and for the same purpose as the scalpings of white women and children had been used by Americans; they were used to organize people into fighting units, into embryos of the national army and the national police.

The presentation of the dictator and of the Party's central committee as a dictatorship of the liberated proletariat seemed to be something new, but even this was new only in the words that were used. This was something as old as the Pharaohs and Lugals of ancient Egypt and

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4 See V.I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964; first published in 1899). I quote from page 599: "if . . . we compare the present rapidity of development with that which could be achieved with the general level of technique and culture as it is today, the present rate of development of capitalism in Russia really must be considered as slow. And it cannot but be slow, for in no single capitalist country has there been such an abundant survival of ancient institutions that are incompatible with capitalism, retard its development, and immeasurably worsen the condition of the producers . . ."

Mesopotamia, who had been chosen by the god to lead the people, who had embodied the people in their dialogues with the god. This was a tried and tested gimmick of rulers. Even if the ancient precedents were temporarily forgotten, a more recent precedent had been provided by the French Committee of Public Health, which had presented itself as the embodiment of the nation's general will.

The goal, communism, the overthrow and supersession of capitalism, also seemed something new, seemed to be a change of circumstances. But only the word was new. the goal of the dictator of the proletariat was still American-style progress, capitalist development, electrification, rapid mass transportation, science, the processing of the natural environment. The goal was the capitalism that the weak and inept Russian bourgeoisie had failed to develop. With Marx's *Capital* as their light and guide, the dictator and his Party would develop capitalism in Russia; they would serve as a substitute bourgeoisie, and they would use the power of the state not only to police the process, but to launch and manage it as well.

Lenin did not live long enough to demonstrate his virtuosity as general manager of Russian capital, but his successor Stalin amply demonstrated the powers of the founder's machine. The first step was the primitive accumulation of capital. If Marx had not been very clear about this, Preobrazhensky had been very clear. Preobrazhensky was jailed, but his description of the tried and tested methods of procuring preliminary capital was applied to vast Russia. The preliminary capital of English, American, Belgian and other capitalists had come from plundered overseas colonies. Russia had no overseas colonies. This lack was no obstacle. The entire Russian countryside was transformed into a colony.

The first sources of preliminary capital were Kulaks, peasants who had something worth plundering. This drive was so successful that it was applied to the remaining peasants as well, with the rational expectation that small amounts plundered from many people would yield a substantial hoard.

The peasants were not the only colonials. The former ruling class had already been thoroughly expropriated of all its wealth and property, but yet other sources of preliminary capital were found. With the totality of

state power concentrated in their hands, the dictators soon discovered that they could manufacture sources of primitive accumulation. Successful entrepreneurs, dissatisfied workers and peasants, militants of competing organizations, even disillusioned Party Members, could be designated as counter-revolutionaries, rounded up, expropriated and shipped off to labor camps. All the deportations, mass executions and expropriations of earlier colonizers were re-enacted in Russia.

Earlier colonizers, being pioneers, had resorted to trial and error. The Russian dictators did not have to resort to trial and error. By their time, all the methods of procuring preliminary capital had been tried and tested, and could be scientifically applied. Russian capital developed in a totally controlled environment, a hothouse; every lever, every variable, was controlled by the national police. Functions which had been left to chance or to other bodies in less controlled environments fell to the police in the Russian hothouse. The fact that the colonials were not abroad but within, and therefore subject not to conquest but to arrest, further increased the role and size of the police. In time the omnipotent and omnipresent police became the visible emanation and embodiment of the proletariat, and communism became a synonym of total police organization and control.

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Lenin's expectations were not, however, fully realized by the Russian hothouse. The police-as-capitalist worked wonders in procuring preliminary capital from expropriated counter-revolutionaries, but did not do nearly as well in managing the capitalist production process. It may still be too early to tell for sure, but to date this police bureaucracy had been at least as inept in this role as the bourgeoisie Lenin had cursed; its ability to discover ever new sources of preliminary capital seems to be all that has kept it afloat.

Nor has the appeal of this apparatus been on a level with Lenin's expectations. The Leninist police apparatus has not appealed to businessmen or to established politicians; it has not recommended itself as a superior method of managing the production process. It has appealed to a somewhat different social class, a class I will briefly try to describe,

and it has recommended itself to this class primarily as a method of seizing national power and secondarily as a method of primitive accumulation of capital.

The heirs of Lenin and Stalin have not been actual Praetorian guards, actual wielders of economic and political power in the name and for the benefit of a superfluous monarch; they have been understudy Praetorians, students of economic and political power who despaired of ever reaching even intermediate levels of power. The Leninist model has offered such people the prospect of leaping over the intermediate levels directly into the central palace.

The heirs of Lenin were clerks and minor officials, people like Mussolini, Mao Zedong and Hitler, people who, like Lenin himself, cursed their weak and inept bourgeoisies for having failed to establish their nation's greatness.

(I do not include the Zionists among the heirs of Lenin because they belong to an earlier generation. They were Lenin's contemporaries who had, perhaps independently, discovered the power of persecution and suffering as welding materials for the mobilization of a national army and police. The Zionists made other contributions of their own. Their treatment of a dispersed religious population as a nation, their imposition of the capitalist nation-state as that population's end-all and be-all, and their reduction of a religious heritage to a racial heritage, contributed significant elements to the nationalist methodology, and would have fateful consequences when they were applied on a population of Jews, not all of them Zionists, by a population welded together as a "German race.")

Mussolini, Mao Zedong and Hitler cut through the curtain of slogans and saw Lenin's and Stalin's feats for what they were: successful methods of seizing and maintaining state power. All three trimmed the methodology down to its essentials. The first step was to join up with likeminded students of power and to form the nucleus of the police organization, an outfit called, after Lenin's, the Party. The next step was to recruit the mass base, the available troops and troop suppliers. The third step was to seize the apparatus of the state, to install the theoretician in the office of Duce, Chairman or Fuehrer, to apportion police and managerial functions among the elite or cadre, and to put the mass

base to work. The fourth step was to secure the preliminary capital needed to repair or launch a military-industrial complex capable of supporting the national leader and cadre, the police and army, the industrial managers; without this capital there could be no weapons, no power, no nation.

The heirs of Lenin and Stalin further trimmed the methodology, in their recruiting drives, by minimizing capitalist exploitation and by concentrating on national oppression. Talk of exploitation no longer served a purpose, and had in fact become embarrassing, since it was obvious to all, especially to wage workers, that successful revolutionaries had not put an end to wage labor, but had extended its domain.

Being as pragmatic as American businessmen, the new revolutionaries did not speak of liberation from wage labor, but of national liberation.<sup>5</sup> This type of liberation was not a dream of romantic utopians; it was precisely what was possible, and all that was possible, in the existing world, one needed only to avail oneself of already existing circumstances to make it happen. National liberation consisted of the liberation of the national chairman and the national police from the chains of powerlessness; the investiture of the chairman and the establishment of the police were not pipe dreams but components of a tried and tested strategy, a science.

Fascist and National Socialist Parties were the first to prove that the strategy worked, that the Bolshevik Party's feat could actually be repeated. The national chairmen and their staffs installed themselves in power and set out to procure the preliminary capital needed for national greatness. The Fascists thrust themselves into one of the last uninvaded regions of Africa and gouged it as earlier industrializers had gouged their colonial empires. The National Socialists targeted Jews, an inner population that had been members of a "unified Germany" as long as other Germans, as their first source of primitive accumulation

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5 Or the liberation of the state: "Our myth is the nation, our myth is the greatness of the nation"; "It is the state which creates the nation, conferring volition and therefore real life on a people made aware of their moral unity"; "Always the maximum of liberty coincides with the maximum force of the state"; "Everything for the state; nothing against the state; nothing outside the state." From *Che cosa è il fascismo* and *La dottrina del fascismo*, quoted by G.H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York, 1955), pp.872-878.

because many of the Jews, like many of Stalin's Kulaks, had things worth plundering.

Zionists had already preceded the National Socialists in reducing a religion to a race, and National Socialists could look back to American pioneers for ways to use the instrument of racism. Hitler's elite needed only to translate the corpus of American racist research to equip their scientific institutes with large libraries. The National Socialists dealt with Jews much the same way as the Americans had earlier dealt with the indigenous population of North America, except that the National Socialists applied a later and much more powerful technology to the task of deporting, expropriating and exterminating human beings. But in this the later exterminators were not innovators; they merely availed themselves of the circumstances within their reach.

The Fascists and National Socialists were joined by Japanese empire-builders who feared that the decomposing Celestial Empire would become a source of preliminary capital for Russian or revolutionary Chinese industrializers. Forming an Axis, the three set out to turn the world's continents into sources of primitive accumulation of capital. They were not bothered by other nations until they started to encroach on the colonies and homelands of established capitalist powers. The reduction of already established capitalists to colonized prey could be practiced internally, where it was always legal since the nation's rulers make its laws – and had already been practiced internally by Leninists and Stalinists. But such a practice would have amounted to a change of circumstances, and it could not be carried abroad without provoking a world war. The Axis powers overreached themselves and lost.

After the war, many reasonable people would speak of the aims of the Axis as irrational and of Hitler as a lunatic. Yet the same reasonable people would consider men like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson sane and rational, even though these men envisioned and began to enact the conquest of a vast continent, the deportation and extermination of the continent's population, at a time when such a project was much less feasible than the project of the Axis.<sup>6</sup> It is true

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6 “... the gradual extension of our settlements will as certainly cause the savage, as the wolf, to retire; both being beast of prey, tho’ they differ in shape” (G. Washington in 1783). “... if ever we are constrained to lift the hatchet against any tribe, we will never lay it down till that tribe is exterminated, or driven beyond . . .” (T. Jefferson

that the technologies as well as the physical, chemical, biological and social sciences applied by Washington and Jefferson were quite different from those applied by the National Socialists. But if knowledge is power, if it was rational for the earlier pioneers to maim and kill with gunpowder in the age of horse-drawn carriages, why was it irrational for National Socialists to maim and kill with high explosives, gas and chemical agents in the age of rockets, submarines and “freeways”?

The Nazis were, if anything, yet more scientifically-oriented than the Americans. In their time, they were a synonym for scientific efficiency to much of the world. They kept files on everything, tabulated and cross tabulated their findings, published their tabulations in scientific journals. Among them, even racism was not the property of frontier rabble-rousers, but of well-endowed institutes.

Many reasonable people seem to equate lunacy with failure. This would not be the first time. Many called Napoleon a lunatic when he was in prison or in exile, but when Napoleon re-emerged as the Emperor, the same people spoke of him with respect, even reverence. Incarceration and exile are not only regarded as remedies for lunacy, but also as its symptoms. Failure is foolishness.

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Mao Zedong, the third pioneering national socialist (or national communist; the second word no longer matters, since it is nothing but a historical relic; the expression “left-wing fascist” would serve as well, but it conveys even less meaning than the nationalist expressions) succeeded in doing for the Celestial Empire what Lenin had done for the Empire of the Tsars. The oldest bureaucratic apparatus in the world did not decompose into smaller units nor into colonies of other industrializers; it re-emerged, greatly changed, as a People’s Republic, as a beacon to “oppressed nations.”

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in 1807). “. . . the cruel massacres they have committed on the women and children of our frontiers taken by surprise, will oblige us now to pursue them to extermination, or drive them to new seats beyond our reach” (T. Jefferson in 1813). Quoted by Richard Drinnon in *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building* (New York: New American Library, 1980), pp.65, 96, 98.

The Chairman and his Cadre followed the footsteps of a long line of predecessors and transformed the Celestial Empire into a vast source of preliminary capital, complete with purges, persecutions and their consequent great leaps forward.

The next stage, the launching of the capitalist production process, was carried out on the Russian model, namely by the national police. This did not work in China any better than it had in Russia. Apparently the entrepreneurial function was to be entrusted to confidence men or hustlers who are able to take other people in, and cops do not usually inspire the required confidence. But this was less important to Maoists than it had been to Leninists. The capitalist production process remains important, at least as important as the regularized drives for primitive accumulation, since without the capital there is no power, no nation. But the Maoists make few, and ever fewer, claims for their model as a superior method of industrialization, and in this they are more modest than the Russians and less disappointed by the results of their industrial police.

The Maoist model offers itself to security guards and students the world over as a tried and tested methodology of power, as a scientific strategy of national liberation. Generally known as Mao-Zedong-Thought,<sup>7</sup> this science offers aspiring chairmen and cadres the prospect of unprecedented power over living beings, human activities and even thoughts. The pope and priests of the Catholic Church, with all their inquisitions and confessions, never had such power, not because they would have rejected it, but because they lacked the instruments made available by modern science and technology.

The liberation of the nation is the last stage in the elimination of parasites. Capitalism and already earlier cleared nature of parasites and reduced most of the rest of nature to raw materials for processing industries. Modern national socialism or social nationalism holds out the prospect of eliminating parasites from human society as well. The human parasites are usually sources of preliminary capital, but the capital is not always “material”; it can also be cultural or “spiritual.” The ways, myths, poetry and music of the people are liquidated as a matter

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7 Readily available in paper back as *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (Peking: Political Department of the people's Liberation Army, 1966).



of course; some of the music and costumes of the former “folk culture” subsequently reappear, processed and packaged, as elements of the national spectacle, as decorations for the national accumulation drives; the ways and myths become raw materials for processing by one or several of the “human sciences.” Even the useless resentment of workers toward their alienated wage labor is liquidated. When the nation is liberated, wage labor ceases to be an onerous burden and becomes a national obligation, to be carried out with joy. The inmates of a totally liberated nation read Orwell’s *1984* as an anthropological study, a description of an earlier age.

It is no longer possible to satirize this state of affairs. Every satire risks becoming a bible for yet another national liberation front.<sup>8</sup> Every satirist risks becoming the founder of a new religion, a Buddha, Zarathustra, Jesus, Muhammad or Marx. Every exposure of the ravages of the dominant system, every critique of the system’s functioning, becomes fodder for the horses of liberators, welding materials for builders of armies. Mao-Zedong- Thought in its numerous versions and revisions is a total science as well as a total theology; it is social physics as well as cosmic metaphysics. The French Committee of National Health claimed to embody the general will of only the French nation. The revisions of Mao-Zedong-Thought claim to embody the general will of all the world’s oppressed.

The constant revisions of this Thought are necessary because its initial formulations were not applicable to all, or in fact to any, of the world’s colonized populations. None of the world’s colonized shared the Chinese heritage of having supported a state apparatus for the past two thousand years. Few of the world’s oppressed had possessed any of the attributes of a nation in the recent or distant past. The Thought had to be adapted to people whose ancestors had lived without national

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8 Black & Red tried to satirize this situation over ten years ago with the publication of a fake *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders*, a “how-to-do-it guide” whose author, Michael Velli, offered to do for the modern revolutionary prince what Machiavelli had offered the feudal prince. This phoney *Manual* fused Mao-Zedong-Thought with the Thought of Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini, Hitler and their modern followers, and offered grizzly recipes for the preparation of revolutionary organizations and the seizure of total power. Disconcertingly, at least half of the requests for this *Manual* came from aspiring national liberators, and it is possible that some of the current versions of the nationalist metaphysic contain recipes offered by Michael Velli.

chairmen, armies or police, without capitalist production processes and therefore without the need for preliminary capital.

These revisions were accomplished by enriching the initial Thought with borrowings from Mussolini, Hitler and the Zionist state of Israel. Mussolini's theory of the fulfillment of the nation in the state was a central tenet. All groups of people, whether small or large, industrial or non-industrial, concentrated or dispersed, were seen as nations, not in terms of their past, but in terms of their aura, their potentiality, a potentiality embedded in their national liberation fronts. Hitler's (and the Zionists') treatment of the nation as a racial entity was another central tenet. The cadres were recruited from among people depleted of their ancestors' kinships and customs, and consequently the liberators were not distinguishable from the oppressors in terms of language, beliefs, customs or weapons; the only welding material that held them to each other and to their mass base was the welding material that had held white servants to white bosses on the American frontier; the "racial bond" gave identities to those without identity, kinship to those who had no kin, community to those who had lost their community; it was the last bond of the culturally depleted.

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The revised thought could now be applied to Africans as well as Navahos, Apaches as well as Palestinians.<sup>9</sup> The borrowings from Mussolini, Hitler and the Zionists are judiciously covered up, because Mussolini and Hitler failed to hold on to their seized power, and

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<sup>9</sup> I am not exaggerating. I have before me a book-length pamphlet titled *The Mythology of the White Proletariat: A Short Course for Understanding Babylon* by J. Sakai (Chicago: Morningstar Press, 1983). As an application of Mao-Zedong-Thought to American history, it is the most sensitive Maoist work I've seen. The author documents and describes, sometimes vividly, the oppression of America's enslaved Africans, the deportations and exterminations of the American continent's indigenous inhabitants, the racist exploitation of Chinese, the incarceration of Japanese-Americans in concentration camps. The author mobilizes all these experiences of unmitigated terror, not to look for ways to supersede the system that perpetrated them, but to urge the victims to reproduce the same system among themselves. Sprinkled with pictures and quotations of chairmen Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong and Ho-chi Minh, this work makes no attempt to hide or disguise its repressive aims; it urges Africans as well as Navahos, Apaches as well as Palestinians, to organize a party, seize state power, and liquidate parasites.

because the successful Zionists have turned their state into the world's policeman against all other national liberation fronts. Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong must be given even more credit than they deserve.

The revised and universally applicable models work much the same as the originals, but more smoothly; national liberation has become an applied science; the apparatus has been frequently tested; the numerous kinks in the originals have by now been straightened out. All that is needed to make the contraption run is a driver, a transmission belt, and fuel.

The driver is of course the theoretician himself, or his closest disciple. The transmission belt is the general staff, the organization, also called the Party or the communist party. This communist party with a small c is exactly what it is popularly understood to be. It is the nucleus of the police organization that does the purging and that will itself be purged once the leader becomes National Leader and needs to re-revise the invariant Thought while adapting himself to the family of nations, or at least to the family bankers, munitions suppliers and investors. And the fuel: the oppressed nation, the suffering masses, the liberated people are and will continue to be the fuel.

The leader and the general staff are not flown in from abroad; they are not foreign agitators. They are integral products of the capitalist production process. This production process has invariably been accompanied by racism. Racism is not a necessary component of production, but racism (in some form) has been a necessary component of the process of primitive accumulation of capital, and it has almost always leaked into the production process.

Industrialized nations have procured their preliminary capital by expropriating, deporting, persecuting and segregating, if not always by exterminating, people designated as legitimate prey. Kinships were broken, environments were destroyed, cultural orientations and ways were extirpated.

Descendants of survivors of such onslaughts are lucky if they preserve the merest relics, the most fleeting shadows of their ancestors' cultures. Many of the descendants do not retain even shadows; they are totally depleted; they go to work; they further enlarge the apparatus that destroyed their ancestors' culture. And in the world of work they are

relegated to the margins, to the most unpleasant and least highly paid jobs. This makes them mad. A supermarket packer, for example, may know more about the stocks and the ordering than the manager, may know that racism is the only reason he is not manager and the manager not a packer. A security guard may know racism is the only reason he's not chief of police. It is among people who have lost all their roots, who dream themselves supermarket managers and chiefs of police, that the national liberation front takes root; this is where the leader and general staff are formed.

Nationalism continues to appeal to the depleted because other prospects appear bleaker. The culture of the ancestors was destroyed; therefore, by pragmatic standard, it failed; the only ancestors who survived were those who accommodated themselves to the invader's system, and they survived on the outskirts of garbage dumps. The varied utopias of poets and dreamers and the numerous "mythologies of the proletariat" have also failed; they have not proven themselves in practice; they have been nothing but hot air, pipe dreams, pies in the sky; the actual proletariat has been as racist as the bosses and the police.

The packer and the security guard have lost contact with the ancient culture; pipe dreams and utopias don't interest them, are in fact dismissed with the practical businessman's contempt toward poets, drifters and dreamers. Nationalism offers them something concrete, something that's been tried and tested and is known to work. There's no earthly reason for the descendants of the persecuted to remain persecuted when nationalism offers them the prospect of becoming persecutors. Near and distant relatives of victims can become a racist nation-state; they can themselves herd other people into concentration camps, push other people around at will, perpetrate genocidal war against them, procure preliminary capital by expropriating them. And if "racial relatives" of Hitler's victims can do it, so can the near and distant relatives of the victims of a Washington, Jackson, Reagan or Begin.

Every oppressed population can become a nation, a photographic negative of the oppressor nation, a place where the former packer is the supermarket's manager, where the former security guard is the chief of police. By applying the corrected strategy, every security guard can follow the precedent of ancient Rome's Praetorian guards. The security

police of a foreign mining trust can proclaim itself a republic, liberate the people, and go on liberating them until they have nothing left but to pray for liberation to end. Even before the seizure of power, a gang can call itself a Front and offer heavily taxed and constantly policed poor people something they still lack: a tribute-gathering organization and a hit-squad, namely supplementary tax farmers and police, the people's own. In these ways, people can be liberated of the traits of their victimized ancestors; all the relics that still survive from pre-industrial times and non-capitalist cultures can at last be permanently extirpated.

The idea that an understanding of the genocide, that a memory of the holocausts, can only lead people to want to dismantle the system, is erroneous. The continuing appeal of nationalism suggests that the opposite is truer, namely that an understanding of genocide has led people to mobilize genocidal armies, that the memory of holocausts has led people to perpetrate holocausts. The sensitive poets who remembered the loss, the researchers who documented it, have been like the pure scientists who discovered the structure of the atom. Applied scientists used the discovery to split the atom's nucleus, to produce weapons which can split every atom's nucleus; Nationalists used the poetry to split and fuse human populations, to mobilize genocidal armies, to perpetrate new holocausts.

The pure scientist, poets and researchers consider themselves innocent of the devastated countrysides and charred bodies.

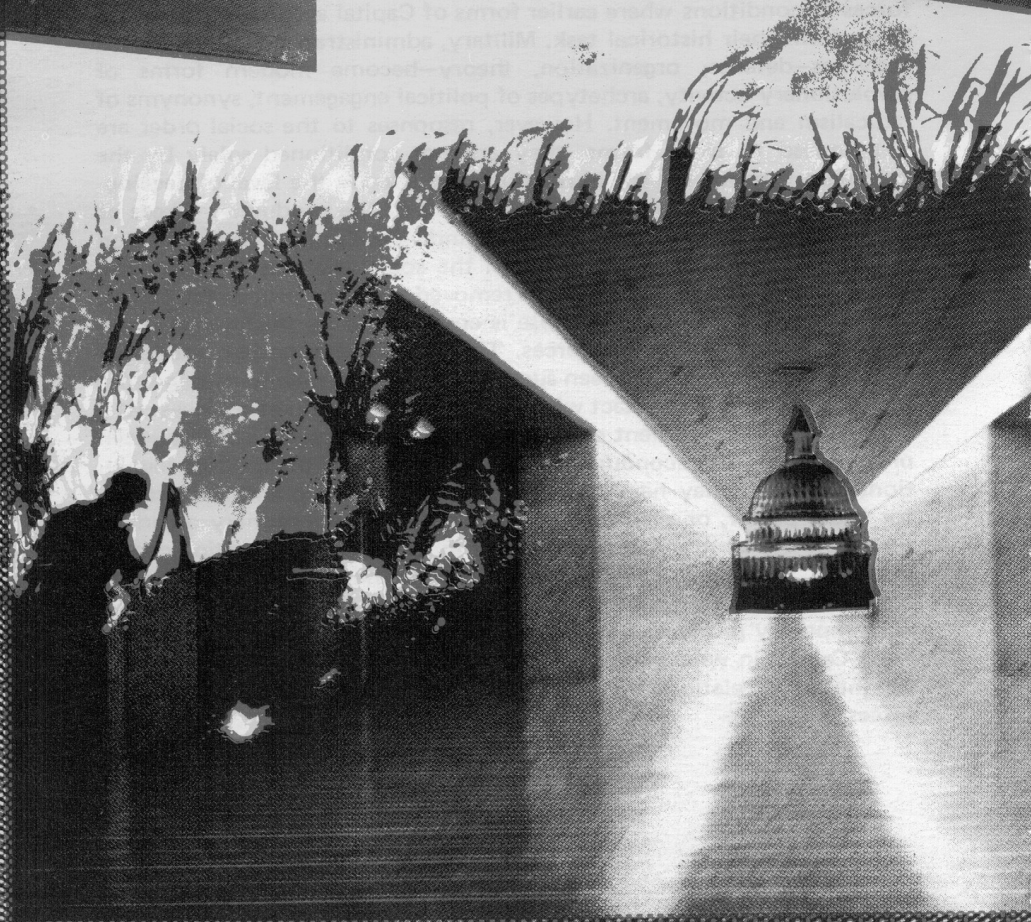
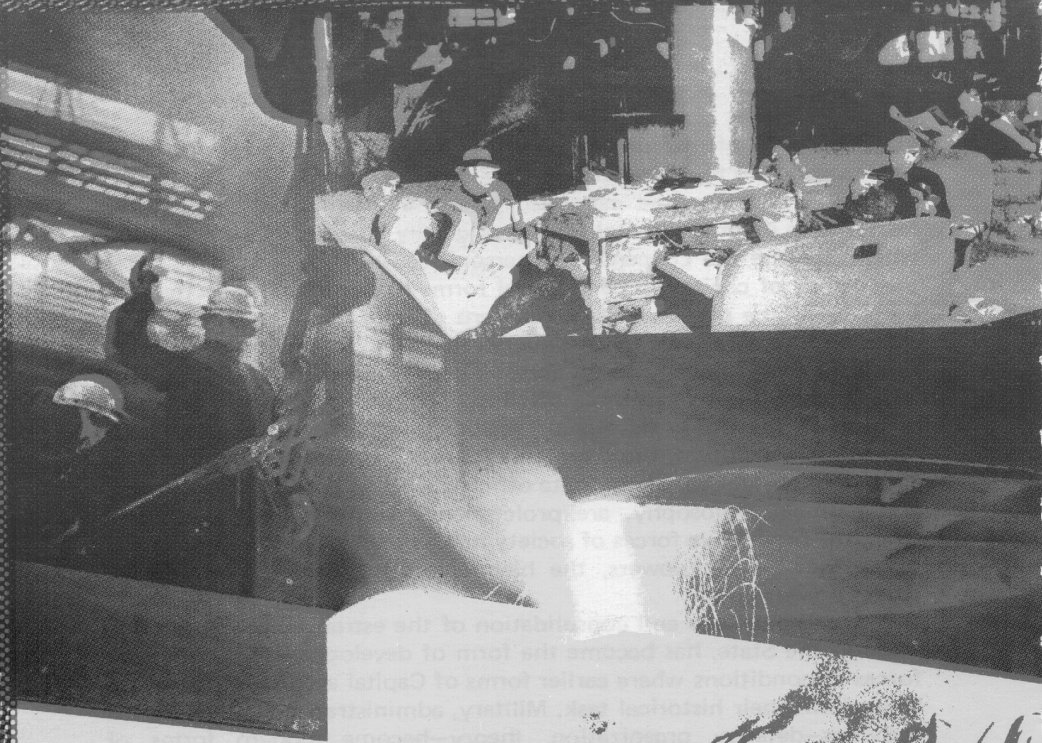
Are they innocent?

It seems to me that at least one of Marx's observations is true: every minute devoted to the capitalist production process, every thought contributed to the industrial system, further enlarges a power that is inimical to nature, to culture, to life. Applied science is not something alien; it is an integral part of the capitalist production process. Nationalism is not flown in from abroad. It is a product of the capitalist production process, like the chemical agents poisoning the lakes, air, animals and people, like the nuclear plants radioactivating micro-environments in preparation for the radioactivation of the macro-environment.

As a postscript I'd like to answer a question before it is asked. The question is: "Don't you think a descendant of oppressed people is better

off as a supermarket manager or police chief?" My answer is another question: What concentration camp manager, national executioner or torturer is not a descendant of oppressed people?







**PART FIVE:**  
**CRITIQUE OF 'PROGRESS'**

## Progress and Nuclear Power

### The Destruction of the Continent and Its Peoples

This article was first published in the April 1979 edition of *Fifth Estate* and was written following a partial meltdown at the Three Mile Island nuclear power station, Pennsylvania. The incident was the most significant accident in the history of U.S nuclear power.

The premeditated poisoning of human beings, of soils and of other living species can only by the grossest hypocrisy be considered an “accident”. Only the willfully blind can claim that this consequence of Technical Progress was “unforeseen”.

The poisoning and removal of this continent’s living inhabitants for the sake of “higher entities” may have begun in Eastern Pennsylvania, but not during the past few weeks.

Eleven score years ago, in the region currently being poisoned by radiation from Three Mile Island, speculators with names like Franklin, Morris, Washington and Hale hid their names behind facades such as the Vandalia Company and the Ohio Company. These companies had one purpose: to sell land for a profit. The individuals behind the companies had one aim: to remove all obstacles which stood in the way of the free deployment of profit-making, whether the obstacles were human beings or millennial cultures or forests or animals or even streams and mountains. Their aim was to civilize this continent, to introduce to it a cycle of activities never before practiced here: Working, Saving, Investing, Selling – the cycle of reproducing and enlarging Capital.

The main obstacle to this activity consisted of human beings who had lived on this continent for millennia and who, without Law or Government or Church, enjoyed the sun, the streams, the woodlands, the varied species of plant and animal, and each other. These people considered life an end, not a means to be put at the service of “higher”

ends. They did not flock to Civilization like children to a cookie jar, as the Franklins and Washington's expected them to do. On the contrary. They wanted very little of what Civilization had to give. They wanted some of the weapons, and they wanted these only to preserve their freedom against further encroachments of Civilization; they preferred death to a life reduced to Working, Saving, Investing and Selling. In a final desperate attempt to drive Civilization and its Benefits to the sea and across it, in an uprising currently remembered as the name of an automobile, their warriors ousted land grabbers and their soldiers from Ontario, Michigan, Ohio and western Pennsylvania. For this unpromising resistance they earned from the Civilized the title of Savages. This title gave the Civilizers a license to exterminate without qualm or scruple: "Send them pox-infested blankets," ordered one of the commanders in charge of the extermination.

The recently celebrated Bicentennial of American Independence commemorated the day when, ten score years ago, land grabbers, speculators and their allies determined to accelerate the extermination of independence from the region west of Three Mile Island. The King's government was too distant to protect investments adequately, and in any case it was Feudal and didn't always share the speculators' aims; it even went so far as to enforce the boundaries established by treaties with the Savages. What was needed was an efficient apparatus under the direct control of the land grabbers and devoted exclusively to the prosperity of their enterprises. Informal frontier police organizations like the Paxton Boys were efficient for the massacre of the tribal inhabitants of an isolated village like Conestoga. But such frontier formations were small and temporary, and they were as dependent on the active consent of each participant as the tribal warriors themselves; therefore they were not proper police organizations at all. The speculators allied themselves with idealists and dreamers, and behind a banner on which was inscribed Freedom, Independence and Happiness, took the power of government, military and police into their own hands.

One and a half centuries ago, the efficient apparatus for the progress of Capital was in high gear. Military and police organizations based on obedience and submission, and not on anyone's active consent, were ready to go into action against people who had resisted that type of

regimentation for twenty thousand years if not longer. Congress passed one of its most explicit bits of legislation: The Indian Removal Act. Within a few years, all resistance, all activity which was not the activity of Capital, was removed from the area stretching westward from Three Mile Island to the Mississippi, southward from Michigan to Georgia. The Government, quickly becoming one of the most powerful in the world, was no longer restricted to poisoning with pox or to the surprise massacre of villagers; it implemented the Removal with a judicious combination of Platitudes, Promises and Police. The remaining free tribes people could not resist this combination without adopting it, but they could not adopt it without ceasing to be free. They chose to remain free, and the last free human beings between Three Mile Island and the Mississippi were Removed.

As settlers moved into the deliberately vacated lands where the very air they breathed gave them a taste of the recently eliminated freedom, they transformed vast woodlands into enlarged replicas of the hell they had left behind. The enjoyment of trails and forests ceased: the forests were burned; the trails became obstacle courses to be traversed as rapidly as Capital made possible. Joy ceased to be life's aim; life itself became mere means; its end was profit. The variety of hundreds of cultural forms was reduced to the uniformity of a unique routine: work, save, invest, sell, everyday from sunrise to sunset, and count money after sundown. Every previous activity, and scores of new ones, were transformed from sources of joy to sources of profit. Corn, beans and squash, the "three sisters" respected and loved by the region's previous inhabitants, became mere commodities for sale at food markets; their sowers and harvesters no longer grew them to enjoy at meals, feasts and festivals, but to sell for profit. Leisurely gardening was replaced by the hard work of farming, trails gave way to rails, walking was superseded by the locomotion of gigantic coal burning furnaces on wheels, canoes were swept aside by floating cities which stopped for no obstacle as they filled the air with burning embers and black smoke. The "three sisters," along with the rest of their family, were degraded to mere merchandise, as were the trees that became lumber, the animals that became meat, and even the journeys, the songs, the myths and tales of the continent's new inhabitants.

And new inhabitants there were: at first hundreds, then thousands, finally millions. When the importation of outright slaves finally ended, surplus peasants were imported from the run down estates of post-feudal Europe. Their ancestors hadn't known freedom for so many generations that the very memory of it had been lost. Formerly liveried domestics or farmhands on the estates of increasingly commercial lords, the newcomers arrived already trained to want precisely what Capital had to offer, and the degradation of life imposed by Capital was freedom to them when compared to their only frame of reference. Sold plots by land investors, transported to the plots by railway investors, equipped by farm implement investors, financed by bank investors, furnished and clothed by the same interests, often by the very same Houses who had provided them with everything else at a rate of profit no previous age would have regarded as "just," they boastfully wrote their relatives in the old country that they had become their own lords, that they were free farmers but in the pits of their stomachs and in the missed beat of their hearts they felt the truth: they were slaves of a master who was even more intractable, inhuman and removed than their former lords, a master whose lethal power, like radioactivity's, could be felt but not seen. They had become the liveried domestics of Capital. (As for those who ended up as "operatives" or "unskilled hands" in the factories that produced the implements and the rails: they had little to boast of in their letters; they had breathed freer air wherever they had started from.)

A century after the uprising associated with the name of Pontiac, a century filled with desperate resistance by Pontiac's successors against the further encroachments of Capital, some of the imported farmers began to fight against their reduction to servants of railroad, equipment and finance Capital. The populist farmers burned to arrest and lock up the Rockefellers, Morgans and Goulds directly responsible for their degradation, but their revolt was only a faint echo of the earlier revolt of Ottawas, Chippewas, Delawares and Potawatomies. The farmers turned against the personalities but continued to share the culture responsible for their degradation. Consequently they failed to unite with, or even recognise as their own, the armed resistance of the plains people, the last to keep the entire continent from being turned into an island of

Capital - a struggle defeated by ancient Assyrian (and modern Soviet Socialist) methods of mass deportation, concentration camps, massacres of unarmed prisoners, and unabated brainwashing by military and missionary goons.

Militant and courageous though many of them were, the struggling farmers rarely placed enjoyment and life above work, savings and profit, and their movement was derailed altogether when radical politicians infiltrated it and equated the desire for a new life with the desire for a new Leader. The form of derailment of the Populist movement became the form of existence of the labour movement during the century that followed. The politicians who dug the grave of populism were the forerunners of the infinite assortment of monkish sects, modeled organizationally on the Jesuit Order but deriving doctrine and dogma from one or another communist, socialist or anarchist Book. Ready to leap at an instant's notice into any situation where people began to struggle to regain their own humanity, they squelched one after another potential rebellion by dumping their doctrine, their organization and their leadership on top of people struggling for life. These clowns, for whom all that was missing was their mugs and speeches on the front pages of newspapers, finally became capitalists who took to market the unique commodity they had cornered: labour.

Shortly before the turn of the present century, with effective resistance permanently removed, with a pseudo-resistance which was in fact an instrument for the final reduction of human activity to a mere variable of Capital, the efficient apparatus for the generation of profits lost all external obstacles. It still had internal obstacles: the various fractions of Capital, the Vanderbilts, Goulds and Morgans, continually turned their guns against each other and threatened to topple the whole structure from within. Rockefeller and Morgan pioneered the merger, the combination of the various fractions: monied investors distributed their monies throughout each other's enterprises; directors sat on each other's boards; and each and all acquired an interest in the unrestricted march of every unit of the entire apparatus. With the exception of rare surviving personal and family empires, the enterprises were directed by mere hirelings who differed from the rest of the hands mainly by the size of their emoluments. The task of the directors was to ride over all

obstacles, human and natural, with only one limitation: the efficient operation of the other enterprises collectively constituting Capital.

Two score years ago, the researches of physical and chemical sciences at the disposal of Capital led to the discovery that the gross substances above and below the soil were not the only substances exploitable for profits. It appeared that the “liberated” nuclei of certain substances were eminently exploitable by Capital. The destruction of matter at the atomic level, first used as the most hideous weapon hitherto wrought by human beings, became the newest commodity. By this time the interest payments, freight fees and equipment purchases of farmers, as well as the long-vanished trees and forest animals, had ceased to be interesting as sources of significant profits. Energy companies interlocked with uranium and oil monopolies became empires more powerful than any of the states which served them as trouble-shooters. Within the computers of these empires, the health and lives of an “acceptable” number of farm and city dwellers was balanced against an “acceptable” gain or loss of profits. Potential popular responses to such calculations were controlled by judicious combinations of platitudes, promises and police.

\* \* \*

- The poisoning of people in Eastern Pennsylvania with cancer-inducing radiation by a system that devotes a substantial portion of its activity to “defense” against nuclear assault from abroad;

- The contamination of food which is to be consumed by the continent’s remaining inhabitants, and the destruction of the prospects of farmers who had dutifully devoted their lives to growing the merchandise interesting to Capital at a stage which ended half a century ago;

- The transformation into a literal minefield, using unprecedentedly lethal poisons and explosives, of a continent once peopled by human beings whose aim in life was to enjoy the air, sun, trees, animals and each other;

- The prospect of a continent covered with raging infernos, their loudspeakers reciting their recorded messages to a charred earth:

“There is no need to overreact; the situation is stable; the leaders have everything under control”.

All this is no accident. It is the present stage of progress of Technology, alias Capital, called Frankenstein by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, considered “neutral” by aspiring managers burning to get their “revolutionary” hands on the controls. For two hundred years Capital developed by destroying nature, by removing and destroying human beings. Capital has now begun a frontal attack on its own domestics; its computers have begun to calculate the expendability of those who’d been taught to think themselves its beneficiaries. If the spirits of the dead could be reborn among the living. Ottawa and Chippewa and Potawatomi warriors could take up the struggle where they left it two centuries ago, augmented by the forces of Sioux, Dakota and Nez Perce, Yana and Medoc and the countless tribes whose languages are no longer spoken. Such a force could round up criminals who would not otherwise be brought before any tribunal. The numerous agents of Capital could then continue to practice their routine of work-save-invest-sell, torturing each other with platitudes, promises and police, inside defused and disconnected power plants, behind plutonium doors.





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