

Cornelius Castoriadis  
Political and Social Writings  
Volume 2



C O R N E L I U S  
C A S T O R I A D I S

POLITICAL

AND SOCIAL

WRITINGS

TRANSLATED AND EDITED  
BY DAVID AMES CURTIS

*Volume 2, 1955-1960: From the Workers'  
Struggle Against Bureaucracy to Revolu-  
tion in the Age of Modern Capitalism*

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# Foreword

*David Ames Curtis*

In presenting this second volume of Cornelius Castoriadis's political and social writings, we refer the reader to the author's preface and the translator/editor's foreword in volume 1 as well as the material published there in the Appendixes. We will merely say a few words of introduction here.

The second volume covers a brief, but very prolific, period of Castoriadis's work. Starting from analyses of wildcat strikes in America, automation strikes and the shop stewards' movement in England, and the new militancy among French workers, Castoriadis chronicled what he saw as an increasingly active detachment, a "coming unstuck" [*décollement*] of the working class from the traditional "working-class" trade-union and political bureaucracy and a movement toward new forms of organization and struggle. The developing crisis within the Eastern bloc and its explicit forms of working-class revolt, which he had first discussed in relation to the 1953 East German revolt in some of the later texts translated for volume 1 and which the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group had been anticipating for years, were analyzed in even greater depth in "The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy," once the cracks in the edifice of the ruling "Communist" bureaucracy were examined in his two short essays on the aftermath of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union ("Khrushchev and the Decomposition of Bureaucratic Ideology" and "Curtain on the Metaphysics of the Trials," the latter being a settling of accounts with Merleau-Ponty and his discussion of the Moscow trials in his 1947 book, *Humanism and Terror*).

Under the impetus of this crisis and its concomitant struggles, and inspired in particular by the Hungarian Revolution, Castoriadis reformulated his first attempts at bringing out the "positive content of socialism" in a very detailed, programmatic discussion of what a nonbureaucratic socialist society might look like ("On the Content of Socialism, II"), and then (*CS III*) in an exploration of

the workers' informal struggle *at the point of production* against the capitalist organization of the business enterprise. He saw this struggle as the creative source of new forms of organization, action, and objectives that are socialist in nature.<sup>1</sup>

The question of how and why to organize in an increasingly bureaucratized world is taken up again in "Proletariat and Organization, I," occasioned by the second split in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group with Claude Lefort and others. Here the antinomy between the goal of the revolutionary organization (socialism as the autonomous activity of the proletariat and as the elimination of hierarchy and of all divisions in society between "directors" and "executants") and the problem of organizing for this goal in the here and now—which was first stated in "Proletarian Leadership" (see volume 1)—is explored in relation to a critique of "traditional" (including Bolshevik) forms of organization as well as an analysis of the history of the workers' movement. These emphases on the creative conflict at the point of production and on the role of a revolutionary organization in fostering autonomous grass-roots action and struggle are brought together in a short piece entitled "What Really Matters," written for the popularized monthly supplement to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (Workers' power).

Finally, our second volume concludes with "Modern Capitalism and Revolution" (*MCR*), the longest and one of the most important of Castoriadis's texts. All of Castoriadis's major themes are restated here. Yet this text, which was occasioned by the unchallenged triumph of Gaullism in May 1958, and the modernization of French capitalism that this event expressed, marks a decisive turn in Castoriadis's writings. By exploring even further the inconsistencies and incoherencies of Marxist theory and practice and by exposing the failure of its predictions, Castoriadis, backing up his arguments with a wealth of data but also challenging to its very roots the entire "objectivist" orientation of traditional Marxism, presents the reader with the choice of remaining Marxist or remaining revolutionary (this will be elaborated in "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory"). He chooses the latter course, using his critique of traditional Marxism to point out ways in which one not only can remain revolutionary but can immensely broaden the concept of what is or can be revolutionary in modern capitalist society, a society whose apparent success in destroying socially meaningful activity and in fostering a consumer society characterized by the bureaucratization, depoliticization, and privatization of life in all spheres has called into question the very possibility of calling this society into question. Published at the very beginning of the decade, Castoriadis enunciated many of the main themes of social change in the sixties, including the revolt of women and youth, the critique of everyday life in all its forms, and the total challenge to traditional institutions and forms of life tending toward the creation of new and autonomous ways of living. Needless to say, these are the themes he elaborates in the texts that are to appear in the planned third volume of the present series.

Though published out of chronological order, we have included at the end of "Modern Capitalism and Revolution" an appendix to the 1965 *Solidarity* translation and an introduction to the 1974 edition of this translation. The appendix puts to rest the Marxist political-economic concept of "the falling rate of



profit.” The 1974 introduction provides a self-examination of the “general conception and method” of *MCR* as well as an update of his analysis, which shows not only how this text was “confirmed by experience” but also how events in the intervening fifteen years, including the “political” upheavals of the 1960s and the “economic” crises of the mid-1970s, can be illuminated within the context of the new revolutionary perspective laid down there.

### Note

1. Deserving special mention is Castoriadis’s discussion of “technique” in the chapter from *CS II* entitled “Socialism is the Transformation of Work.” The distinction he makes there between “technique” and “technology” lays the theoretical basis for a socialist project—*to be carried out by the workers themselves*—of adapting and changing existing tools and of inventing new tools and work processes appropriate to their new needs and situation in a society undergoing a socialist transformation. The important, but relatively uncritical, concept of “appropriate technology” current today could be greatly strengthened and broadened by incorporating Castoriadis’s insights on this matter.

# Abbreviations

## Text Abbreviations for Volumes Written by Cornelius Castoriadis

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <i>CL</i>    | <i>Les Carrefours du labyrinthe</i> (Editions du Seuil, 1978). <i>Crossroads in the Labyrinth</i> (MIT Press and Harvester Press Limited, 1984).   |
| <i>CMR 1</i> | <i>Capitalisme moderne et révolution, 1: L'Impérialisme et la guerre</i> (10/18, 1979).  |
| <i>CMR 2</i> | <i>Capitalisme moderne et révolution, 2: Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne</i> (10/18, 1979).   |
| <i>CS</i>    | <i>Le Contenu du socialisme</i> (10/18, 1979).   |
| <i>DH</i>    | <i>Domaines de l'homme</i> (Le Seuil, 1986).   |
| <i>EMO 1</i> | <i>L'Expérience du mouvement ouvrier, 1: Comment lutter</i> (10/18, 1974).   |
| <i>EMO 2</i> | <i>L'Expérience du mouvement ouvrier, 2: Prolétariat et organisation</i> (10/18, 1974).  |
| <i>IIS</i>   | <i>L'Institution imaginaire de la société</i> (Le Seuil, 1975). <i>The Imaginary Institution of Society</i> (MIT Press and Polity Press, 1987).  |
| <i>PSW 1</i> | <i>Political and Social Writings, Volume 1. 1946-1955: From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Positive Content of Socialism</i> (University of Minnesota Press).                        |
| <i>PSW 2</i> | <i>Political and Social Writings, Volume 2. 1956-1960: From the Workers' Struggle against Bureaucracy to Revolution in the Age of Modern Capitalism</i> (University of Minnesota Press). |

- PSW 3* *Political and Social Writings, Volume 3. 1961-1979: Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society* (Planned; University of Minnesota Press).
- SB 1* *La Société bureaucratique, 1: Les Rapports de production en Russie* (10/18, 1973).
- SB 2* *La Société bureaucratique, 2: La Révolution contre la bureaucratie* (10/18, 1973).
- SF* *La Société française* (10/18, 1979).

### Text Abbreviations for Articles Written by Cornelius Castoriadis

- CFP* "La Concentration des forces productives," unpublished (March 1948); *SB 1*, pp. 101-13. "The Concentration of the Forces of Production," *PSW 1*.
- CS I-III* "Sur le contenu du socialisme," *S. ou B.*, 17 (July 1955), 22 (July 1957), 23 (January 1958); reprinted in *CS*, pp. 67-102 and 103-221, and *EMO 2*, pp. 9-88. "On the Content of Socialism," *PSW 1* and *PSW 2*.
- DC I, II* "Sur le dynamique du capitalisme," *S. ou B.*, 12 and 13 (August 1953 and January 1954).
- HMO/HWM\** "La Question de l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier" (1973), *EMO 1*, pp. 11-120. "The Question of the History of the Movement," *PSW 3* (planned).
- IG/GI* "Introduction générale," *SB 1*, pp. 11-61. "General Introduction," *PSW 1*.
- MRCM/MCR I-III* "Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne," *S. ou B.*, 31, 32, and 33 (December 1960, April and December, 1961); *CMR 2*, pp. 47-258. "Modern Capitalism and Revolution," *PSW 2*.
- MTR/MRT I-V* "Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire," *S. ou B.*, 36-40 (April 1964-June 1965); reprinted in *IIS*, pp. 13-230. "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory" is in the first part of the translation of *IIS*.
- PhCP* "La Phénoménologie de la conscience prolétarienne," unpublished (March 1948); *SB 1*, pp. 115-30.
- PO I, II* "Proletariat et organisation," *S. ou B.*, 27 and 28 (April and July, 1959); reprinted in *EMO 2*, pp. 123-87 and 189-248. "Proletariat and Organization, I," *PSW 2* (part II not included in this series; see Appendix C in *PSW 1*).

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <i>RIB/RBI*</i> | “Le Rôle de l'idéologie bolchevique dans la naissance de la bureaucratie,” <i>S. ou B.</i> , 35 (January 1964); reprinted in <i>EMO 2</i> , pp. 385-416. “The Role of Bolshevik Ideology in the Birth of the Bureaucracy,” <i>PSW 3</i> (planned). |
| <i>RPB/PRAB</i> | “La Révolution prolétarienne contre la bureaucratie,” <i>S. ou B.</i> , 20 (December 1956); reprinted in <i>SB 2</i> , pp. 267-337. “The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy,” <i>PSW 2</i> .   |
| <i>RPR</i>      | “Les Rapports de production en Russie,” <i>S. ou B.</i> , 2 (May 1949); reprinted in <i>SB 1</i> , pp. 205-81. “The Relations of Production in Russia,” <i>PSW 1</i> .   |
| <i>RR*</i>      | “Recommencer la révolution,” <i>S. ou B.</i> , 35 (January 1964); reprinted in <i>EMO 2</i> , pp. 307-65. “Recommencing the Revolution,” <i>PSW 3</i> (planned). See Appendix C in <i>PSW 1</i> for previous title.                                |
| <i>SB</i>       | “Socialisme ou Barbarie,” <i>S. ou B.</i> , 1 (March 1949); reprinted in <i>SB 1</i> , pp. 139-83. “Socialism or Barbarism,” <i>PSW 1</i> .  |
| <i>SIPP</i>     | “La Situation de l'impérialisme et perspectives du prolétariat,” <i>S. ou B.</i> , 14 (April 1954); reprinted in <i>CMR 1</i> , pp. 379-440. “The Situation of Imperialism and Proletarian Perspectives,” <i>PSW 1</i> .                           |

\*Planned third volume texts that already exist in translation; see Appendix C in *PSW 1*.

### Text Abbreviations for Frequently Cited Texts

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <i>LCW</i>    | V. I. Lenin, <i>Collected Works</i> (various editions will be cited in notes).                                   |
| <i>LSW</i>    | V. I. Lenin, <i>Selected Works</i> (New York: International Publishers, 1943).                                   |
| <i>LSWONE</i> | V. I. Lenin, <i>Selected Works. One-Volume Edition</i> (New York: International Publishers, 1971).               |
| <i>MECW</i>   | Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, <i>Collected Works</i> . 40 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1974-86). |
| <i>MESW</i>   | Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, <i>Selected Works in One Volume</i> (New York: International Publishers, 1968).  |

# A Note on the Text and Its Notes

As the author mentions in his preface to volume 1, the texts included in the 10/18 series were reprinted verbatim, with a few exceptions, which may be summarized as follows:

1. Unannotated corrections of misprints and a few *lapsus calami*.
2. Placement, in brackets, of phrases designed to clarify the text.
3. Placement, on the title page of each article, of Publication Notes.
4. Insertion of new Author's Notes, designated in lowercase Roman letters.
5. Addition of several "Postfaces" to certain texts, elaborating the author's current views, correcting what he viewed as errors in his previously-published writings, or referring the reader to more recent texts.
6. Inclusion of new texts written especially for the 10/18 series.
7. Updating of references, which continue to appear in Author's Notes designated by Arabic numerals.

In presenting this abridged translation of Castoriadis's 10/18 writings, we have adopted the author's editorial principles, making only a few minor alterations and additions:

1. Addition of new Translator/Editor's Notes, which are preceded by the designation "T/E."
2. Inclusion of additional Translator/Editor's information in existing Notes.
3. Insertion of French phrases directly in the text to clarify the meaning of a passage. These phrases appear italicized and placed in brackets.
4. Updating of references, providing the most recent English-language version wherever possible.



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# 1

## Wildcat Strikes in the American Automobile Industry

Bourgeois and reformist propaganda in Europe makes deliberate reference to the situation of the American proletariat. It claims to show with this example that the “absence of class struggles” and a “friendly collaboration” between workers and bosses—involving a “socially responsible attitude” on the bosses’ part, and support for the interests of the business enterprise on the workers’ part—lead to the good fortune of all concerned, for, this propaganda claims, production is increased and a higher standard of living is granted to the working class. And when the contracts between the American automobile trade unions and first Ford, and then General Motors, were settled, the most “serious” French journalists did not hesitate to speak of the end of capitalism in the United States and of a new era of social history that was about to dawn.

Obviously, American reality is utterly different from this primitive, comic-strip view. Certainly, American capitalism has been able, for more than a century, to develop without any domestic or foreign obstacles on a virgin continent richly endowed by nature, thus bringing production to levels that no one else has been able to attain. This comfortable position has allowed it to grant relatively high wages at the same time, it must be added, that the availability of free land compelled them to do so, up to the beginning of this century.<sup>1</sup> But relatively high wage levels far from constitute the sole, or even the most important, characteristic of the condition of American workers. Without mentioning the celebrated but unfortunate “depressed third of the nation”—fifty million Americans living in poverty, even according to European standards—we need only recall that the American worker pays for his wage through a much greater exploitation of his labor power in production, a soul-destroying work pace, and

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Originally published as “Les Grèves sauvages de l’industrie automobile américaine,” *S. ou B.*, 18 (January 1956). Reprinted in *EMO I*, pp. 279-303.

complete enslavement to machines and the assembly line. And yet, contrary to the assertions of bourgeois propaganda—which on occasion is akin to that of the Stalinists<sup>2</sup>—the bosses have not given up anything that was not extracted from them by force or imposed by the threat of struggle any more in the United States than elsewhere; the history of the American proletariat is filled with battles that, if they have not attained till now the political level of those of the European proletariat, at times have surpassed them in their violence and in the effectiveness of their organization.<sup>3</sup> But from a long-range perspective, the most important thing undoubtedly is that the class struggle at the point of production, the proletariat's revolt against the structure of the capitalist factory, its methods of organizing production, and the labor conditions that these methods entail, is livelier and profounder here than anywhere else. It is no accident that, after Taylorism, the “human relations” movement developed in the United States with the aim of inventing techniques capable of taming the workers' incessant revolt against capitalist production relations in a tactful way—since one cannot be tamed by brute force.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, faced with this set of conditions and a growing proletarian combativeness, it remains true that American capitalism has been led to follow a policy that can be summarized in schematic terms by saying that, when it is forced to make concessions, it shows itself to be disposed, more than European capitalism, to give in on wages, while making up for these wage increases by increasing production and by stepping up productivity.

Since the war this policy has enjoyed the total complicity of the trade-union bureaucracy. Incapable of defending the workers' demands on the level of the relations of production, of the organization of labor, and of labor conditions—since these demands, taken together, amount to a challenge to capitalist power in the factory and whose sole possible outcome would be workers' management of production—this labor bureaucracy uses the workers only as a means to force its own way into the administrative authority that controls production, and it tries to appease them by “satisfying” their wage demands. But its whole policy results more and more in the following contradiction: Trying to maintain its grip on the workers, without which it would again become nothing, it compensates for its inability to satisfy their basic demands by winning more or less real economic advantages, though such advantages are now becoming less and less important as the workers' material and cultural levels are raised.

Thus the American trade-union bureaucracy successively has obtained from the capitalists a kind of sliding scale that ties wages first to the cost of living, then to the rate of productivity increases, then a “pension plan,” and finally, in June 1955, the “guaranteed annual wage.”

Of course, all these “reforms” are far from really containing everything their names imply. Although this is a relatively secondary point, we will try to show it briefly in the case of the “guaranteed annual wage,” the attainment of which has provoked the strikes to which this article is devoted.

American workers are bound to their employers by collective agreements or “contracts” of a set length of time. Beyond wage rates, they specify in extremely detailed fashion what jobs workers can be assigned to, based upon the skills they

possess, as well as overall labor conditions. In addition, these contracts, which are negotiated between the trade-union leadership and the employers each time they come up for renewal, usually include no-strike clauses that remain in effect for the duration of the agreement. In cases where it is still possible to strike, it has to be done under the auspices of the “legal” or “official” trade union. If not (i.e., if it is a “wildcat” strike),<sup>5</sup> the strikers are left to fend for themselves: The trade union will not support them financially, the courts will stop them from picketing, etc.

The renewal period for these contracts is the occasion for arduous negotiations between trade unions and employers. During this period, the threat of a strike hangs over the negotiations, in case they fail and the contract expires.

This past year,<sup>a</sup> as the UAW’s contracts with the industry’s “Big Three” (Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler) were just about to expire, the UAW’s president (who at the same time is president of the CIO) made the centerpiece of his negotiation demands his plan for a “guaranteed annual wage” (GAW), i.e., an unemployment fund supported by employer contributions that would pay to unemployed workers the equivalent of a full wage for a year. The State already pays unemployment compensation for twenty-six weeks, equivalent to around a third of one’s pay; according to Reuther’s plan, the employers would have to contribute to the workers’ unemployment compensation fund in order for it to reach 80 percent of one’s wage for a year. Assuming that half of the workers are unemployed one year in six, this would be equivalent to an increase in the company’s wage outlays (or total worker payroll) on the order of 6 percent.

The employers did not agree to this proposal, and what Reuther eventually “obtained” was an employer contribution limited to twenty-six weeks and lower than the one demanded, so that the unemployed worker would receive a total of 65 percent of his pay for four weeks and 60 percent for twenty-two weeks. The “guaranteed annual wage” thus is in fact a “guaranteed wage for less than two-thirds of one’s wages during a six-month period,” and it is financed in half by employers with the rest coming from public contributions. Using the hypothetical figures introduced earlier (half of the workers unemployed one year in six), it amounts to an increase in the company’s wage outlays on the order of 1.5 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Thus having surrendered a full three-quarters of the ground on which he had taken his stand without once asking the workers their opinion, Reuther not only publicly declared victory but also tried to convince the workers of the “historic” importance of the new contract.

Without consulting anyone and least of all the interested parties, Reuther and his bureaucracy had decided that what the workers needed was neither a wage increase nor a slowdown in the speed of work nor a half-hour daily work break, no, none of those things. Rather they decided that what the workers needed was what Reuther himself *knew* they needed: his “historic” plan for a guaranteed annual wage. To this decision the workers responded with an explosion of wildcat strikes, which were directed as much against the trade-union bureaucracy as against the bosses and which demonstrated that Reuther is committing fraud by talking “in the name of the workers.”

The description of these strikes given in the pages that follow provides first-hand testimony published by two American working-class journals: *Correspondence* and *News and Letters*,<sup>7</sup> both of which come out in Detroit, the center of the American automobile industry.

### Reuther's Strategy and the Attitude of the Workers

The strategy Reuther employed to obtain the guaranteed annual wage consisted of a plan to negotiate in succession with the "Big Three" of the American automobile industry: Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler. All he asked of the workers was to pay five dollars a month until a strike fund of \$25 million was built up and to get ready "in case the union needed them." As for the negotiations, Reuther called on the workers to give him a strike-authorization vote. In the past, under similar circumstances, the workers have always authorized a strike in order to reinforce the union's bargaining position. But this time endless arguments broke out in the factories.

At the Rouge (Ford) factory, which employs 48,000 workers, most of the workers thought they had no alternative but to vote for a strike; otherwise, "the company might smash the union." Another group of workers felt they could not vote for a strike, but they also could not vote against the union; so they decided not to vote at all. We must note here the great contrast with the past: In the past when workers would not vote, they would be ashamed to admit it or they would find some excuse to justify themselves.

A few advanced workers (neither Stalinists nor Trotskyists) went even further. They said they would vote against the strike. They were not against the "guaranteed annual wage," but they were not for it either. They rejected Reuther's program and his strategy to win it from top to bottom. They said that they were fed up with the union's unbroken record of giving in on working conditions and with its policies that ended up giving more and more power to the company.

Ever since the pension plan of 1950 and the five-year contract that went along with it, the workers have been learning what Reuther's big economic packages mean to them. Every worker under fifty felt that Reuther's pension plan was tying him down to fifteen, twenty-five, or forty-five more years of the same kind of work in the same plant. These workers wanted guaranteed working conditions, not a guarantee that they would have to work the same old way for the rest of their lives.

They were opposed to the "guaranteed annual wage" as well as to Reuther's strategy of striking one plant while the others kept working. The majority of Ford workers felt that for any strike to be effective, the whole CIO should go out.

As many workers said, "The company and the union decide what we'll get—and we have to vote for that. If the union really represented us, they'd ask us what we want. Then they'd negotiate for that." They are fed up with the union deciding what they should fight for.

Nevertheless, as the vote drew closer, many workers who wanted to vote against the strike authorization changed their minds. One reason was that the union published a pamphlet entitled *We Work at Ford*, which pointed out the evils at Ford before the days of the union. This was typical bureaucratic demagoguery. The pamphlet told, in 1955, of conditions at Ford before 1935, conditions that had been changed, of course, only by the great working-class battles of 1935-37. Some workers, however, were swayed by such demagoguery. One fellow said he had changed his mind and would vote for the strike authorization because "we work for such a ratty company."

The majority of the Ford Rouge workers had no confidence in Reuther and Co. But a strike vote left no choice, so they voted yes to make clear their opposition to the Ford Company. The vote for the strike was 45,458 to 1,132, with about 10,000 abstentions.

A few days before the first strike deadline at Ford the company handed the union a counterproposal on the "guaranteed annual wage." It was an offer whereby workers could buy company stocks at half-price.

The workers took every opportunity to joke about this management proposal. Workers ran around calling each other "Mr. Stockholder." One worker ordered the foreman to go away because "we're holding a stockholders' meeting." Actually, they had detected management's trick; if workers owned company stock, management could speed up the line and tell them "it's for your own benefit."

Reuther had carefully chosen Ford rather than GM as his first target. Henry Ford II and the men around him belong to the same generation of "planners" as Reuther himself. The "guaranteed annual wage" is as natural to Ford's thinking as it is to Reuther's. Rather than haggling over a nickel increase for the workers, both Ford and Reuther preferred to put aside five cents an hour for the workers' "security"; then the worker would not be able to "waste" his money.

In agreeing to the "guaranteed annual wage," Henry Ford II was continuing his father's tradition of controlling the lives of the company's workers. The only difference was that the elder Ford did it through private spies and the Bennett Service Department, while Reuther and Ford II planned to do it through a closely cooperating corps of union, company, and government administrators.

In preparing the "guaranteed annual wage" proposal, Reuther had gotten together a staff of 250 administrators. In order to work out the economics of GAW, he had gone into the universities and hired some of the best brains of sociologists and economists. Step by step, and as he was taking the union away from the workers, Reuther set up an administrative and bureaucratic apparatus to rival that of industry and the State.

### Wildcat at Ford Rouge

The labor accord between Ford and the CIO's automobile union, the UAW, was

signed June 6. While Reuther and Bugas, Ford vice-president and chief company negotiator, were triumphantly posing for photographs, explaining how many hours of sleep they had lost and how many cups of coffee they had drunk, each bending over backward in mutual congratulations to give the other credit for statesmanship, wildcat strikes erupted in Ford plants all over the country.

The 4,300 tool and die workers at Rouge started the strike and 6,000 maintenance workers immediately went on strike in support of these first strikers. The workers said that they were not interested in the "guaranteed annual wage," and demanded a thirty-cent an hour increase. But the widespread nature of the wildcat strikes showed that much more than thirty cents was involved. Ford Motor Co. has plants in twenty-three major cities all over the country. At the peak of the strikes, on June 7 and 8, there were stoppages in thirty-seven plants, and 74,000 of Ford's 140,000 workers were not working. In a number of cases the strike developed around "local grievances" (safety, health, rest periods, wage inequities, etc.). This was the first time this expression was used. GM workers were soon to send it ringing around the entire country.

The president of the local union at the Rouge plant (Local 600) is Carl Stellato, who gained his reputation as a "left-wing" opponent of Reuther, but when it comes to strikes, his policy was no different from Reuther's. At midnight on June 5, Stellato had issued an appeal to local officers to "keep the men on the job."

Stellato's speech on June 6 needs to be recorded for history. To the thousands of jeering and booing workers, Stellato said, "Don't boo me. Go boo Ford. . . . You cannot boo security. That's what you are getting, security. This contract will go down in history."

Television newscasts brought knowledge of this meeting to people throughout the country. The cameras traveled over the thousands and thousands of workers, occasionally picking out a jeering and hooting face until it reached the platform where Stellato was speaking. But his impressive speaking lost all meaning against such a background. He was just one man. However, when a rank-and-file member came to the TV microphone saying the committeemen were being paid by the company to sell them out, he was part of the thousands and all the men around him shouted in agreement. On newscasts later in the evening, these speeches by rank-and-file workers were often cut and the sound of the booing was subdued, but the impact of thousands of workers against one union leader was never completely lost.

Every parking lot and street corner around the Rouge plant became a meeting place with the union leaders distributing back-to-work leaflets informing strikers that under the constitution they had to work until the contract had been voted up or down. Skilled workers demonstrated, crying out, "G.R.R." (Get Rid of Reuther); "Reuther and Stellato have sold us down the river for GAW." This revolt of the skilled workers is of particular significance because, ever since Reuther lost the confidence of the production workers,<sup>b</sup> he has been building up a base among the skilled tradesmen. The skilled workers issued a release saying that they were not just putting up a narrow fight for themselves but that the struggle "was being transferred into the new field of waging a campaign against

the adoption of the new contract.” They appealed to “all Ford workers to join in this campaign.”

The resumption of production at Ford depended on the attitude of the maintenance workers. Their discussions had been lively. Some said, “We don’t want the committeemen setup, but what can we do?” Others said, “If we ask for more money, all that will happen is that the prices of cars will go up.” They asked each other, “What is the concrete alternative? If we don’t accept this agreement, the whole contract will have to be rewritten.”

The skilled workers finally went back to work June 8. On June 20 and 21, the Rouge local vote on the new Ford contract was taken. It was accepted, 17,567 votes to 8,325; 30,000 workers did not vote, however, because they were opposed to the contract but saw no alternative. The contract was actually approved by less than a third of the work unit.

Stellato hailed the vote for the contract as “complete evidence that the members failed to heed the swan song of those elements who have tried to make political capital at the expense of the Ford workers and their families.” This ambitious politician was the only one who dared to imply that politicians had started the strike. Unlike any other big actions by American workers in recent history, this was the first time that it was impossible for anybody to talk about “Communist agitators.”

A few days after the signing of the Ford contract, Henry Ford II proposed that industrywide bargaining be the next step. Reuther’s reply was that that really would be a way to make small crises into big ones. The nightmare of a general strike now hangs over Reuther and the auto companies.

### **The GM Strikes**

Reuther’s success with Ford had unquestionably softened up General Motors. Reuther therefore prepared for a new “victory.”

General Motors has 119 plants in fifty-four cities employing about 350,000 wage workers. During June 6-13, the week of negotiations with GM, the Ford strikes were taking place. They gave the signal for an outbreak of wildcat strikes in a dozen GM plants in several states (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Missouri, Kansas, Michigan, and California). Most of the time they were aimed at satisfying “local grievances.”

At the Buick-Oldsmobile-Pontiac (BOP) plant in Southgate, California, strikers said that the union was not discussing with the company what they wanted.

One worker said,

We want four things locally. We want a 15-minute break in the morning and afternoon to get a cup of coffee. Is that asking a lot?

We want a decent relief system so that a guy can tend to his

physical needs when he must. You just would not believe men have to wait hours to get excused from the line for a couple of minutes.

We want protective clothing at company expense.

We want a few minutes at company expense to clean our hands and put away our tools.

The local president and the regional director tried to force the workers back, but the workers voted 10 to 1 to remain out. The local president admitted that the ranks were in control. "The membership is running things," he said. "They told me that they were going to stay out until they get some satisfaction over the issues." The International sent a special representative from Detroit to try to persuade the men back to work. The men voted to put an ad in the Detroit papers stating their demands. These California workers were looking for a way to establish contact with the Detroit workers independently of the union structure.

Enraged by the wildcats, Reuther and Livingston (GM UAW director) sent a telegram on June 8 to local union officials accusing the GM strikers of "sabotaging national negotiations." Reuther demanded loyalty from his machine. "Entire principle of unionism, teamwork and mutual responsibility is at stake," he told them. "There can be no excuse for any leadership deserting these principles at this time, regardless of any existing situation. Local leaders are therefore mandated under the constitution to notify the membership of these instructions and to work tirelessly towards ending these unauthorized stoppages."

As a result of this barrage from the International, the local leaders at the Chevrolet plant in Cleveland issued a back-to-work circular. "We know that you are demonstrating against bad working conditions in this shop," they said. "If GM does not give in to our just demands, we will shut the plant down in a legal authorized orderly manner."

Except at the BOP plant in Southgate, California, the GM wildcat strikes that had occurred prior to the expiration of the pact ended on Friday, June 10. At the Southgate plant, the strikers finally went back to work on June 14, after staging an hour and a half stop-work meeting.

The pact with GM was signed on June 13. Reuther and Livingston immediately issued a victory release, concluding, "The credit, of course, goes to the rank-and-file workers in GM plants whose maturity, whose willingness to stand up for the principles in which they believe, was the biggest single force on the union's side of the bargaining table."

The response of the rank-and-file workers to Reuther was immediate: 125,000 GM workers were out on this same Monday, June 13.

Almost everywhere workers brought up "local issues" concerning working conditions. The biggest GM strikes in Detroit were in the Cadillac plant and the Fleetwood plant, which makes Cadillac bodies. The Fleetwood workers presented the company with thirty-four local grievances, including company supply of gloves, boots, and aprons; coffee breaks; washup time; etc.

In a statement signed by Anthony Kassib (Fleetwood local president) and the executive board, Reuther was notified that "bodies will not roll off the assembly



lines until our local issues are resolved.” The forty-eight officers said they would resign unless the International recognized that the strike was legal. An International officer said that if the local officers resigned, the union would probably appoint an administrator to run the local. At the local meeting strikers proposed picketing Solidarity House, the International’s headquarters. The motion was defeated, but while local officers were presenting the plant’s demands on the International, 150 Fleetwood strikers gathered outside Solidarity House. They jeered the local leaders and threatened to bring down the strikers unless the International authorized their strike.

The local leaders invited Reuther, Livingston, and other International officers down to the local. The International officers declined. Reuther was not showing his face anywhere except at the green company bargaining tables, the International offices, and on the cover of *Time*.<sup>8</sup>

At the neighboring Cadillac plant, thirty-two local issues were presented: against speedup, wage inequities, more washup time, paid lunch break, etc. The Cadillac strikers sent a delegation to the Fleetwood strikers. All the union ever does is send down orders and representatives from the International headquarters to the locals. The locals, on the other hand, are constantly trying to organize means of communication with one another.

All over the country during the week of June 13-17, GM workers were out. Meanwhile, however, the capitalist press could not adjust itself to the fact staring it right in the face that Reuther no longer represented the auto workers. The press was totally unprepared for this wave of strikes. The *Detroit Free Press*, for example, carried a lengthy feature by its labor expert under a big front-page headline, saying that GAW means “BIG AUTO STRIKES ARE DEAD.”

By Monday, June 20, the union already had forced most of the strikers to return. However, a new strike broke out at the GM plant at Willow Run (near Detroit). This plant manufactures the automatic transmissions for all Pontiac, Oldsmobile, and Cadillac cars.

The strike again was over “local issues.” On Friday, June 24, at a local meeting strikers jeered and hooted local and International leaders ordering them back to work. They voted to continue their strike and said they would picket Solidarity House as well as the plant because the UAW “is trying to force the contract down our throats.” They demanded to know “what is happening to the five dollar a month strike assessments.”

After this meeting the International called another meeting for the following Sunday because it “was confident a true expression of the majority of the membership will mean an immediate return to work.” Detroit workers, attentively following these events, expected that the union would be up to its usual trick of packing the meeting with hacks and holding it at a time and place when workers could not attend. But at the Sunday meeting with more than a thousand workers in attendance the vote was 9 to 1 to continue the strike. The meeting also voted 514 to 367 against accepting the GM contract. On Monday, June 27, the workers rushed the plant, got their paychecks, and left. GM, realizing that the International leadership was no longer able to control the ranks, went to court and got

an injunction against picketing. The CIO International leadership went along with court action against a strike for the first time in its history. Individual strikers were named as defendants. Before the judge, attorneys for the union argued that the International and local officers were blameless in the strike. "We repudiate the people engaged in this picketing. We do not represent them in this picketing. They are on a frolic of their own."

Finally, at a stormy meeting held June 28, a vote for going back to work carried. Livingston threw the book at the tool sharpeners who had instigated the strike, threatening them with suspension from the union and a trial. Strikers shouted that they could win "regardless of the International." The vote to return to work was finally 1,259 to 513, with approximately 1,400 not voting.

As the Willow Run strike was nearing its end, the workers at the Ternstedt plant in Flint, which makes hardware and fittings for GM cars, walked out, led by the skilled tradesmen. At a meeting of the local, the GM contract was rejected and the local officials had to call for another meeting and another vote.

Since these strikes, 2,000 skilled workers from Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio have met in Flint to set up machinery for possible withdrawal from the UAW-CIO and for the formation of a new union.

Let us mention, in closing, a conclusion drawn by one of the American workers' papers we have used to present these events: "A movement is now under way," writes *Correspondence*, "to break from the stranglehold of the CIO bureaucracy by establishing new forms of organization. No one knows exactly what will happen next or the many forms this revolt will take. Rank-and-file auto workers have now learned that they can lead a nation-wide strike without the assistance of the bureaucratic machine."

## Notes

1. The famous "closing of the frontier" actually did not take place until a short time before the beginning of World War I; till then, the abundance of free land and great opportunities for migration within the country meant that the real wages of the industrial worker could not be lower than the real income of an independent landowner who had at his disposal as much land as he and his family could cultivate.

2. The "passivity" of American workers often has been invoked by Stalinist and crypto-Stalinist propagandists, especially at the height of the cold war, in order to create an anti-American psychology toward the entire population of the United States. Likewise, during the Second World War, their propaganda, which came to be directed against Germans as such, presented the German proletariat as completely integrated into nazism.

3. The great factory-occupation strikes of 1935-37, which led to the formation of the CIO, are only one example of these kinds of battles.

4. Paul Romano's document, "L'Ouvrier américain," and Ria Stone's study, "La Reconstruction de la société," published in *S. ou B.* issues 1-8, grippingly illustrate these aspects of the class struggle in the United States and their enormous importance for the future. [T/E: See Romano and Stone's *The American Worker* (1947; reprinted, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1972).]

5. T/E: The phrase appears in English, followed by the French translation: *grève sauvage*.

6. The hypothetical figures given in the text concerning the duration of unemployment and the percentage of workers affected are equivalent to assuming an average level of regular unemployment equal to 1/12 of the total work force, or 8 1/3 percent—a percentage much higher than the actual one. In view of this, GAW actually represents for the employers an even smaller cost. The percentage increases given in the text concerning the company's wage outlays are based upon simple arithmetic.

Before this contract was signed, the company spent in 6 years,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  years of wages, or 286 weeks. Now it will expend an additional 35 percent for 4 weeks, plus 30 percent for 22 weeks:  $4 \times 0.35 + 22 \times 0.30 = 7.8$  weeks, which when halved (half of the workers are unemployed) and then divided by 286, yields an increase of a little less than 1.5 percent. Let us recall that the State already contributes unemployment compensation equivalent to 30 percent of total pay during the first 26 weeks of unemployment.

7. T/E: *Correspondence*, 2 (August 1955); *News and Letters*, 1 (June 24, 1955). (The editor of *Correspondence*, Charles Denby, resigned and began publication of *News and Letters* with this issue.) Most of Castoriadis's article consists of his abridged translation of the *Correspondence* account. We have used the English wording verbatim (except for minor stylistic changes) whenever his translation does not substantially differ from the original.

8. A "serious-minded" illustrated American magazine with a large circulation.

a) 1955.

b) These are the *semiskilled production workers*, or what the French call "OS," who work at machines or on assembly lines. [T/E: The phrase in italics appears in English in the original French note. The abbreviation OS stands for *ouvrier spécialisé*, and translates as "semiskilled worker," as Castoriadis notes.]

## 2 Workers Confront the Bureaucracy

The preceding articles<sup>a</sup> provide as complete a description as could be desired of the main working-class struggles of 1955 in France, England, and the United States. It is not an obsession with information, the number of people who participated in these struggles, their physical combativeness, or even the concessions won that justifies the length of these articles. It is that these struggles assume in our eyes a historical significance by virtue of their content. For the reader who has glanced through the preceding pages, we are not getting ahead of the conclusions of this article if we say that in the summer of 1955 the proletariat has manifested itself in a new way. It has autonomously determined its objectives and its means of struggle; it has posed the problem of how to set up its own autonomous organization; and, finally, it has defined itself against this bureaucracy and separated itself from it in a fashion that is pregnant with future consequences.

The first sign of the proletariat's new attitude toward the bureaucracy undoubtedly was the revolt of the East Berlin and East German proletariat in June 1953 against the Stalinist bureaucracy in power there. During the summer of 1955, this same separation between the proletariat and the "working-class" bureaucracy became clearly apparent in the main Western capitalist countries. The important thing is that hereafter this separation becomes an active one. The proletariat no longer merely refuses to cooperate with the bureaucracy by failing to act; it no longer understands the opposition between its interests and those of the trade-union and political leaders in a merely passive way; indeed, it no longer even limits itself to entering into struggle against bureaucratic orders. It is entering into struggle against the bureaucracy in person (England, the United

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States) or conducts its struggle as if the bureaucracy did not exist, reducing it to insignificance and impotence by the tremendous weight of its active presence (France).

We need to retrace a few of our steps in order to put these events in perspective. A few years ago, "Marxists" of every stripe generally agreed that problems concerning the relations between the proletariat and the "working-class" bureaucracy could be ignored. Some thought there was no proletariat outside bureaucratized organizations, and therefore not outside the bureaucracy. Others thought the workers could only slavishly follow the bureaucracy, or else give in to apathy, and that they had to take sides with it. Others still, who were more valiant, claimed that the workers had forgotten everything, that they had to have their class consciousness reeducated. There was a different motivation for the paranoia of "orthodox" Trotskyists, but the inferences they drew were the same since for them the bureaucracy was only the product of a fortuitous set of circumstances that was bound to burst apart as soon as the workers entered into struggle; for this, one merely had to take up again the good old Bolshevik slogans and offer the workers an "honest" party and trade union.

We have always affirmed in this review, against the conspiracy of mystifiers of all different allegiances, that the true problem of the present epoch is the problem of the relations between workers and the bureaucracy. The proletariat had to go through an unprecedented experience that would have to continue for a long time, since the "working-class" bureaucracy, deeply rooted as it was in the economic, political, and social development of capitalism, could not be toppled overnight. Of necessity, the workers were going through a quiet period of maturation, for it was not possible for them to purely and simply take up again against the bureaucracy the methods of struggle and the organizational forms traditionally used against capitalism. But in addition, we also argued that this historically necessary experience would lead the proletariat to formulate concretely and definitively its own forms of organization and rule.

The development of contemporary society will become more and more dominated by the increasing separation and opposition between the proletariat and the bureaucracy. As this opposition deepens, new organizational forms will begin to emerge that will allow the workers to abolish the power of the exploiters, whoever they may be, and to rebuild society on new foundations. This process is still only in its embryonic stage. The first elements of this process, however, already have begun to appear. After the East Berlin workers came out in June 1953, the metalworkers of Nantes, the dockworkers of London and Liverpool, and the automobile workers of Detroit have clearly shown in 1955 that they would rely on themselves alone in their struggle against exploitation.

### **The Significance of the Strike in Nantes**

To understand the working-class struggles of the summer of 1955, and especially those in Nantes, we must place these struggles within the context of how the French proletariat has developed since 1945.

In contrast to the initial period following the “liberation,” where on the whole the workers followed the policy of the bureaucratic organizations and in particular that of the CP, beginning in 1947-48 we find the workers becoming markedly more and more “unstuck” from these organizations. The proletariat starts from its experience of their real attitude. It begins to subject these organizations to a silent criticism and to express this criticism in reality by refusing to follow their orders any longer. This “coming unstuck,” this refusal to cooperate, takes several quite distinct forms that follow one another chronologically:

1. From 1948 to 1952, the workers’ total and obstinate refusal to follow bureaucratic orders is expressed by inaction and apathy. In the majority of cases, strikes called by Stalinists are not respected, not only in the case of “political” strikes, but even strikes over economic issues. This is not simply a matter of discouragement; there is also the awareness that the CP is using working-class struggles and diverting them from their class goals in order to serve Russian policy. The proof of this is that, in the rare cases in which “united action” between Stalinist, reformist, and Christian unions is achieved, the workers readily enter into action—not because they attach some value to this unity as such, but because they see in it the proof that the struggle in question cannot easily be diverted toward bureaucratic ends and because they will not be divided among themselves.

2. In August 1953, millions of workers spontaneously go on strike without orders from the trade-union bureaucracies or even against orders. Nevertheless, once on strike, they leave the actual leadership of the strike up to the unions, and the strike itself is “passive.”<sup>1</sup> Building occupations are extremely rare, and at strike meetings the base almost never makes its presence felt except through voting.

3. During the summer of 1955, the workers again spontaneously enter into struggle, but that is not all they do. At Nantes, at Saint-Nazaire, and in other localities, they do not simply go on strike, nor are they even content to occupy buildings. They go on the offensive, support their demands by exerting extraordinary physical pressure, demonstrating in the streets and battling with the CRS.<sup>2</sup> They no longer leave the leadership of the struggle up to the union bureaucrats. At the height of the struggle, in Nantes, they have such total control over the union bureaucrats through their direct collective pressure that, in negotiating with the boss, the union officials merely play the role of agent (or rather of mouthpiece).<sup>3</sup> The real leaders are the workers themselves.

One must not get the different significations belonging to these successive attitudes mixed up. What they have in common is that the workers are detaching themselves from the traditional leadership groups. But as the awareness of the opposition between working-class interests and bureaucratic policy grows, the workers express this awareness in their concrete behavior by becoming more and more active. Expressed at the outset as a simple refusal to cooperate and in the form of inaction, by 1955 it takes the concrete form of working-class activity in which the class starts to take full control over all aspects of its struggle with no intermediary. This can plainly be seen if one reflects on the events that have taken place in Nantes.

People have tried to see in the strikes at Nantes and Saint-Nazaire essentially a demonstration of working-class violence, some in order to rejoice in it, others in order to grieve about it. And certainly we can, we should even, start off by noting how rare it is for working-class struggles to reach such a level of violence during a period in which the regime is stable. Much more important than the degree of violence, however, is the manner in which this violence was brought to bear, the direction in which it was oriented, and the relations it expressed between the workers on one side and the apparatus of the capitalist State and the trade-union bureaucracies on the other. To be more precise, the extent of the violence modified its content and brought this working-class action onto a wholly different level. The Nantes workers did not act violently because they were following the orders of some bureaucracy—as had occurred to a certain extent in 1948, during the miners' strike.<sup>4</sup> They acted *against* union orders. This violence signified that the workers had established a permanent and active presence in the strike and in negotiations, and thus were they allowed not to exert some degree of control over the unions but rather to *overtake* these unions altogether in an absolutely unforeseen manner. There is not the least doubt about the willingness of the union leaders throughout the strike to limit the struggle in its duration, in its extent, in the import of its demands, and in the methods employed, so as to obtain an agreement as rapidly as possible and to bring everything back to order. However, these irreplaceable "chiefs" trembled before the 15,000 metalworkers who had taken over the streets and would not give them back; their "action" during the strike is invisible to the naked eye, and only through some wretched behind-the-scenes maneuvers were they able to play the role of saboteurs. Even while negotiations were going on they were nothing more than a telephone line transmitting demands unanimously formulated by the workers themselves—until the workers discovered that this line was of no use and stormed into the negotiating room.

Certainly, neither the defects nor the negative aspects of the Nantes movement can be ignored. Though it had overtaken the unions in reality, the movement had not eliminated them as such. The attitude of the workers of Nantes contains a radical challenge to the trade unions. They trust them neither to define their demands nor to defend them nor to negotiate for them. And they rely only on themselves. The total distrust they have expressed in their actions is infinitely more important than *what* these same workers might "think" or "say" at the same time or *whom* they might have voted for during the recent legislative elections. Nevertheless, contradictions in the workers' attitude persist. First of all, these contradictions exist between their way of "thinking," as it emerges in discussions about voting on trade-union or political issues prior or subsequent to the strike, and their mode of "acting," which is the strike itself. In the former case, the union merely is tolerated as the lesser evil; in the latter case, it is ignored. Even within this mode of acting, contradictions persist: The workers are, so to speak, both "on the near side" and "beyond" the problem of bureaucracy. They are on the near side insofar as they leave the bureaucracy in place, do not attack it head on, do not substitute for it their own elected organizations. Yet they also are beyond this problem. For on the terrain where they are situated, a

total struggle wrought through their permanent presence turns the bureaucracy's role into a minor one. Truly speaking, they are preoccupied with it very little: Occupying the stage in massive numbers, they leave the bureaucracy to play as it will behind the scenes. And the backstage hardly counts during the first act. The trade unions cannot yet do any harm; the workers are too detached from them.

This detachment does not culminate, it will be said, however, in a positive crystallization in the form of getting organized on their own, independent of the unions; there is not even an elected strike committee representing the strikers, responsible to them, etc.

One could draw up an entire list of such defects, but they are of only limited import. One can say, certainly, that the movement did not arrive at an autonomous form of organization. But in saying so, one shows that one already has a certain organizational form in mind. *There is no form of organization that is more autonomous than 15,000 workers acting unanimously in the streets.* But again, it will be said that by not electing a strike committee directly responsible to them and revocable at any time, the workers gave the union bureaucrats room to maneuver. Well, this is true. But how can one not see that the workers would not have exercised more control even over an elected strike committee than they exercised over these union representatives on August 17? Who cannot see that such a committee would not have been able to do anything more at that time than what these representatives did under pressure from the workers? When the mass of workers, united as one body, clearly knowing what it wants and completely determined to get it, is constantly present at the scene of action, what more can an elected strike committee offer?

The importance of such a committee is to be found elsewhere. On the one hand, it could have tried to extend the struggle beyond Nantes. On the other hand, during the period in which the movement began to experience setbacks, it could have tried to help the workers better defend themselves against the maneuvers of the trade unions and the bosses. But we should not create any illusions about the actual role it might have been able to play. The extension of the movement depended very little on some appeals a Nantes committee might have been able to launch and much more on other conditions that had not gelled. The conduct of the negotiations during the phase in which the movement was in decline had a relatively secondary importance; it was the relation of forces in the city that remained decisive, and it was becoming less and less favorable.

Obviously, we are far from criticizing the notion of an elected strike committee in general or even in the case of Nantes. We are simply saying that in this latter case and seeing the level the workers' struggle attained, the significance of its action would have been, in any case, secondary. If the action of the Nantes workers has not been crowned with total victory, it is because it was up against objective contradictions that could not have been altered at all by the election of a strike committee.

The dynamic of the development of the struggle in Nantes indeed had resulted in a contradiction that may be defined in the following terms: Revolution-



any methods were utilized in a situation that was not, and for goals that were not, revolutionary. The strike was followed by factory occupations; the bosses countered by calling in the CRS regiments; the workers countered by attacking the CRS. Could this struggle have gone any further? But what was any further than that? The seizure of power in Nantes? This contradiction, in fact, would be carried to the point of paroxysm if organs (which in this situation could have only a revolutionary content) were set up. Any committee that would have considered the situation seriously would have resigned, or the next thing it would have done would have been to start methodically driving the CRS out of the city—but with what prospect? We are not saying that the Nantes workers were using such hindsight; what we are saying is that the objective logic of the situation did not afford much sense to any attempt to set up a permanent workers' organization.

But, it will be said, such a prospect existed. It was possible to extend the movement. Once again one surreptitiously introduces one's own ideas into the real situation, which does not conform to them. For the Nantes workers, it was a local strike with a precise objective: a forty-franc raise. It was not for them the first act of a revolution, it was not a question for them of getting caught up in such an effort. They used revolutionary means to get their claim settled—therein we have the very essence of our era; but that does not mean revolution is possible at every instant.

It has been claimed, however, that it was “objectively possible” to extend this movement. And certainly, if the bourgeoisie needed 8,000 CRS agents to hold out, with great difficulty, against 15,000 workers, we do not see where it would have found the forces required to hold out against five million workers throughout the whole country. But the fact is that the French working class was not ready to enter into such decisive action, and it did not enter into it. The features we have analyzed here come together only in the Nantes movement. They appear, in an embryonic form, only in a few other localities, and they form an impressive contrast to the absence of any large movement in the Parisian region. At the very moment the struggles at Nantes were unfolding, the Renault plant in Paris presents us with the most classical picture of dispersion. The workers there seemed to be having the hardest time overcoming the discrete sabotage efforts being carried out by their union leaders.<sup>5</sup>

To say under such conditions that the failure to extend the movement is due to the attitude of the bureaucratic union federations is meaningless. This merely says that these union federations accomplished their mission. The Trotskyists act surprised and curse them. Others understand that the union federations will be able to play their role only as long as the workers have not attained the degree of clarity and decisiveness necessary to act on their own. If the Parisian workers had wanted to enter into the struggle, could the unions have prevented them from doing so? Probably not. The proof? Precisely this: Nantes.

There are, in the last analysis, two ways of looking at the relation between the action of the Nantes workers and the inaction of the majority of the French proletariat. One way is to stress the isolation of the Nantes movement and to try, starting from this point, to limit its import. This view is correct if one wants to appreciate the nature of the present situation: One must guard against adventur-

ist interpretations and recall that the French proletariat is not on the verge of undertaking an all-out struggle. But this view is false if one wants to look at the significance of the methods of action used in Nantes, the attitude of workers confronting the bureaucracy, and the direction of the process of maturation under way among the working class. From this point of view, a revolutionary will always say: *If* the Nantes workers, isolated in their province, showed such maturity in their struggle, *then* the majority of French workers, and in particular the Parisian workers, will create, when they enter into movement, still more advanced, more effective, and more radical organizational forms and forms of action.

In acting as they did—as a coherent mass, as a democratic collectivity in movement—the workers of Nantes achieved for one long moment an autonomous form of organization that contains, in embryo, the answer to the following important question: What is the proletarian form of organization that is capable of doing away with the bureaucracy and the capitalist State? The answer is that, at an elementary level, this form is nothing but the total mass of workers themselves. This mass is not only, as some have wanted to believe and make others believe for a long time, the shock power, the “infantry” of class action. When the conditions are right, it develops astonishing capacities for self-organization, self-direction, and self-leadership. It establishes within itself the necessary differentiation of functions without crystallizing them into structural differentiations; there is a division of tasks that is not a division of labor. Indeed, at Nantes there were workers who manufactured “bombs” while others made contacts, but there was no “headquarters,” no “general staff,” either an official one or a secret one. This “elementary nucleus” of the working class proved itself equal to the problems posed to it and capable of mastering almost every form of resistance it encountered.

We rightly say, “an embryo of an answer.” We say an “embryo” not only because Nantes was a real situation and not a model, nor just because, aside from these features, one encounters others that betoken difficulties and defeats for the working masses. All this is secondary since for us what is of prime importance in the present situation is that which prefigures future developments. We also say an “embryo” because there are clear limitations on this form of organization in time, in space, and in relation to universal and permanent goals. Today, however, this is not what we are concerned with: Before going any further we must make sense of what already has happened.

What conditions permitted the Nantes movement to reach this level in the first place?

The fundamental condition was the virtual unanimity of the participants. This unanimity, which is genuine working-class unity, ought not, of course, to be confused with what Stalinists or Trotskyists call unity of action. This type of unity, even when it pretends to be concerned with the grass roots, in fact is only the unity of its bureaucracies; it existed in Nantes, but it was the *result* of working-class unity, it was imposed on the bureaucracy by the workers. Not that the workers were ever bothered for an instant or “demanded” that their leaders get unified; in fact, they ignored them, and acted unanimously. The bureaucrats

then understood that their only chance to maintain any contact with the movement at all was to act like they were “united.”

Working-class unanimity manifested itself first of all on the level of defining the basic demand. Unless we are wrong, no one to this day knows “who” put forth the slogan of a forty-franc raise for everyone. In any case, it wasn’t the unions; one would seek in vain to find such an objective in their programs. Moreover, by its nonhierarchical character, the Nantes workers’ demand goes directly against every union’s program. All the more remarkable is that this unanimity was achieved on a demand for a uniform wage increase for everyone among workers with highly differentiated pay scales.

This unanimity likewise manifested itself on the question of what means were to be employed. This was true all during the struggle. At each new turn in the “tactical” situation, the workers spontaneously and collectively provided the adequate response. They went from a strike with no fixed duration to a factory occupation, and then to action against the CRS.

Last, there was total unanimity on the workers’ own role. You win only what you yourself fight for. *No one* but the workers themselves could be relied upon, not even the unions and the “working class’s” parties. These unions and parties stood condemned en bloc through the actions of the Nantes workers.

This attitude toward the bureaucracy obviously results from having had a profound objective experience of it. We cannot dwell on this point here, which by itself alone merits a long examination. Let us say simply that the conditions for this experience were provided in France by one elementary fact: After ten years of “action” and trade-union demagogy, the workers are discovering that they were able to stop their condition from deteriorating only when they went on strike. And let us add that even the partial success of the Nantes and Saint-Nazaire movements will drive this experience forward because it furnishes it with a new counterproof: In a few weeks time, these movements have won more for the workers than ten years of trade-union “negotiations” have won.

The analysis of these conditions demonstrates that the form taken by the Nantes movement is not an aberrant one, and still less a residue of some allegedly “primitive” traits, but rather the product of factors at work everywhere that show to present-day society the face of its own future. The mass democracy in Nantes has sprung from working-class unanimity; the latter, in its turn, has resulted from the working class’s awareness of its own basic interests and from a common experience it has shared of capitalism and bureaucracy. The premises for this common experience are magnified day after day by the very action of capitalists and bureaucrats.

### **The Common Characteristics of the Strikes in France, England, and the United States**

An analysis similar to the one we have attempted here would have to be done in the case of the English dockworker and American automobile worker strikes. Such analyses would allow us to bring out other characteristics of these move-

ments that would be equally profound and pregnant with consequences: to cite just one, the growing importance that demands other than those related to wages begin to take on, as capitalism and the proletariat develop concomitantly. Of prime importance are demands relating to working conditions. These kinds of demands lead directly to the problem of how to organize production. Ultimately it poses the problem of how to manage. We cannot undertake such an analysis here; the reader can refer to the articles devoted to these struggles in the preceding pages of this issue.

It is important, nevertheless, to determine what right now are the characteristics common to all these movements. The principal one is obvious, namely, the workers' overt and militant opposition to bureaucracy, their refusal to "let themselves be represented." This has taken the most explicit form possible in England: English dockworkers went on strike for seven weeks against the trade-union bureaucracy itself and no one else. Just like the East German workers in 1953, the English dockworkers attacked the bureaucracy—here "socialist," there "Communist"—as the direct enemy. The attack was scarcely less explicit in the United States: The autoworkers' strikes that followed the signing of the CIO-Ford-General Motors agreements on the guaranteed annual wage certainly were directed against the bosses as far as the content of the demands were concerned, but at the same time they formed a striking demonstration of the workers' repudiation of trade-union policy. They were equivalent to saying to the trade unions: You do not represent us, your concerns are not our interests, and what interests us, you ignore. We have seen, finally, that in France the Nantes workers have "left the bureaucracy aside" during their struggle or have merely "used" union bureaucrats in minor posts.

In the second place, there is no trace of any kind of "outflanking" of the bureaucracy in any of these movements. These struggles are not contained, so to speak, from the start in a bureaucratic framework within which they would develop and which they would eventually "outflank." The bureaucracy has been *made obsolete [dépassée]*—the movement takes place *from the very outset on another terrain*. That does not mean that the bureaucracy is abolished or that the proletariat now evolves in a world where it no longer can encounter this bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is still there, and the proletariat's relations with it are not only complex but confused: The bureaucracy is at the same time proxy, enemy, immediate object for applying pressure, and negligible quantity. But there is one thing it no longer is: a leadership accepted and followed in the course of struggles, or even at their commencement. The Trotskyist concept of outflanking (a theoretical reconstruction of Lenin's practice against social democracy and, in particular, of the experience of 1917) presupposed that at the start the masses are situated on the same terrain as their "traitorous" leaders and will remain under their hold until the experience they have acquired with the aid of the revolutionary party in the course of their struggles frees them from these leadership groups. Now, contemporary experience, and that of 1955 above all, shows that the masses enter into action starting from an experience of bureaucracy that precedes this action itself, and which therefore is *independent* of the bureaucracy—if not even *against* it. For in the meantime, the bureaucracy has acquired an ob-

jective existence as an integral part of the system of exploitation. In 1917, menshevism was only a form of discourse; Stalinism, the Labour party, and the CIO are, to various degrees, forms of power.

We thus are led to a third consideration. From 1923 to 1953, revolutionaries were reduced to impotently contemplating a vicious circle. The working class was able to gain a definitive experience of various bureaucratic leadership groups only in the course of its struggles; but the very existence of these leadership groups and the hold they exercised meant either that these struggles quite simply were never launched at all, or that they were defeated, or, finally, that they remained till the end under the control of the bureaucracy, which therefore made use of these struggles for its own ends. We are not presenting a theory here but rather a condensed and accurate description of the last thirty years of history of the labor movement. For example, the very existence of Stalinism and the hold it has exercised prevented the proletariat's experience from developing in a revolutionary direction during periods of crisis. It does not change anything to say that this was due to the absence of a revolutionary party; Stalinism's hold signified that the very possibility of setting up a revolutionary party had been suppressed. Above all, it meant the physical elimination of anybody who tried to become a revolutionary militant.<sup>6</sup>

Now, the struggles of the summer of 1955 are a first sign that the vicious circle has been broken. It has been broken by the action of the working class itself, starting out from its accumulated experience. This experience has not been an experience of the bureaucracy's role as the "traitorous" leadership of revolutionary struggles but rather of its daily activity as warden of capitalist exploitation. For this experience to blossom, it is not necessary for the bureaucracy to come to power. The workings of the economic system on the one hand, and the daily, elementary class struggle on the other, inexorably force the bureaucracy to become an integral part of the system of exploitation and to reveal its true nature to the workers. Just as it was impossible to build up a revolutionary organization by explaining to French workers how Stalinism committed class betrayal in China in 1927, so now is it possible to build such an organization by helping them organize in their daily struggle against exploitation and against the instruments of this exploitation in the labor unions and among the "working-class" political parties.

What conclusions can we draw from this analysis for the problem of how to organize the proletariat and its vanguard?

The Nantes strike as well as the English dockworkers' strike show the adequate organizational form for workers in action. We will not hark back again to the content of this form or its potential limitations. By the very nature of things and until a new order is established, however, such forms neither are nor can be permanent under the capitalist system of rule. The problem of how to organize working-class minorities during periods of inaction remains. Nevertheless, it is now posed in a new way.

First of all, we must state that the degree of maturity the struggles of 1955 have revealed prevents us from posing the questions of "economic demands"

and “political demands” separately. We have known for a long time that they are objectively indissociable. They also will become more and more indissociable in the minds of the workers. A militant minority of workers organized in a plant—whether they adopt the form of a committee of struggle, a group united around a workers’ journal, or an autonomous union—will have to affirm this indivisibility in the clearest possible terms from the very outset. We do not mean by this that it should indulge in any Trotskyist magic tricks, which produce demands for a five-franc raise, a general strike, and revolution like so many rabbits out of a hat. On the contrary, it should scrupulously avoid such sleight-of-hand tricks and condemn the charlatans who indulge in them if they show their faces. In 999 cases out of 1,000, a strike for five francs is a strike for five francs and nothing more. Or rather, the something more contained in the strike comes not from what the strike brings to the struggle for power but from that which it runs up against, under one form or another, in the apparatus of capitalist domination that is *internal* to the factory system and that is incarnated by the “working-class” bureaucracy. Only by bringing to light its *total* nature, which is simultaneously economic, political, and ideological, will one be able to organize the struggle against this bureaucracy. At the same time, workers cannot move effectively among the multiple contradictions that even the most elementary struggle for economic demands under the conditions of declining capitalism give rise to—contradictions we have pointed to in the Nantes example—unless they come to situate their struggles in a more general perspective. Supplying this perspective is the essential function of organized minorities.

We must also understand, however, that, even when it is a matter of such elementary struggles, the task of organized minorities is to aid in the growth of democratic-collective forms of organization run by the mass of workers themselves. Nantes has furnished us with an example of this kind of organization. These types of organizational forms already have proved to be the only *effective* ones; more and more they will prove to be the only *possible* ones.

### Notes

1. With the exception of a few localities, of which Nantes is the most important.
2. T/E: The *Compagnies républicaines de sécurité* are the French riot police created by a Socialist cabinet minister to control postwar strikes. They later gained international notoriety when they battled French students in May 1968.
3. We are referring to the ascendant phase of the movement; the decline of the strike signified that the bureaucracy had to a certain extent “regained control”—everything being relative, of course.
4. The battles between the miners and the police literally took on, in certain places, the character of a civil war.
5. See Daniel Mothé’s article, “Il faut se débrouiller,” *S. ou B.*, 18 (January 1956), pp. 123-27, as well as the description of the Citroën strike found in the selections from *Tribune Ouvrière*, at the end of this same issue.
6. Moreover, the Trotskyists who adhered to this position might very well ask themselves—though once does not make a habit—why such a party has not been able to be constituted for the past thirty years. They thus would be referred back, as the saying goes, to the preceding problem.
  - a) Beyond the two preceding articles (“Les Grèves sauvages de l’industrie automobile américaine,” and “Les Grèves des dockers anglais”), *S. ou B.*, no. 18, contained a series of analyses about

the 1955 strikes in France (in particular those that occurred in Nantes and Saint-Nazaire). [T/E: The first of these articles, "Wildcat Strikes in the American Automobile Industry," appears in this volume in translation. The second article ("The English Dockworker Strikes") is not included in the present edition.]

### 3

## Automation Strikes in England

A year and a half ago, the precarious balance on which British capitalism has rested since the war was again threatened with being upset. Prices were rising, imports were increasing, and exports, under the growing pressure of international—and in particular German and Japanese—competition, were stagnating. Thinking that the roots of this evil were to be found in excessive domestic demand that was absorbing too great a proportion of production and not leaving enough for exports, Eden's conservative government tried to combat "inflationary pressures" by means of tax increases and credit restrictions, especially credit on car sales; through these measures it also hoped to induce a certain increase in unemployment, which English capitalists consider an excellent way of disciplining workers and forcing them to "moderate their wage demands." The government's measures have had, till now, only a slow, limited, and uncertain effect on the balance of foreign payments; on the other hand, they have succeeded in bringing about a halt in the growth of production, which has been practically stagnant now for nearly a year, and in delivering a serious blow to the automobile industry, where the workday has been shortened several times since the beginning of the year.

It is in this climate that the April-May 1956 strike of Standard Motor Company workers in Coventry took place. Already in the month of March an industrial dispute had broken out when the workers would not accept the rotating lay-off of 250 workers a day, as had been decided by the company. But when, on April 27, Standard's 11,000 workers went on strike, rejecting the dismissal of 3,000 among them, the event had an infinitely greater significance.

Standard, one of the "Big Five" in the English automobile industry, owns

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two plants in Coventry, the Canley factory, where 6,000 workers manufacture cars, and the Banner Lane factory, where 5,000 turn out 70,000 tractors a year (about half of all English tractors produced). The dismissal of 3,000 workers was the result of a reorganization and complete retooling of the tractor factory; the introduction of "automated" methods in this factory will allow the company to raise annual production to 100,000 tractors while reducing by half the number of personnel employed. This reduction in personnel was presented by the company as "temporary" and was accompanied by promises to rehire them once the company had completed its retooling work. The workers refused to accept this, and their stewards presented counterproposals aimed at a reduction of work time for all personnel and a reorganization of the company's production plans. These proposals were turned down by management. The ensuing strike lasted fifteen days. It ended on May 11 when management partially backed down and promised to reexamine the problem in consultation with the workers' stewards. On May 25 management accepted some of the workers' proposals, but on May 31 it rejected others and declared that it was going to dismiss 2,600 workers. Since then a conflict has been brewing between the men and their shop stewards, on one side, who want to go on strike, and the official trade unions on the other side, who are trying by all kinds of maneuvers to avoid this sort of struggle.

The Standard workers' strike has had immense repercussions in England. It would not be an exaggeration to say that, since April 26, "automation" has become one of the major preoccupations of the workers, the unions, the capitalists, and the English government. What was for so long only utopia and "science fiction," what yesterday was still on the drawing boards and planning charts of the industry's engineers and top accountants, has become in a few days a predominant factor in the social history of our time and the subject for front-page headlines in the major newspapers. For the problems raised by automation affect both the "liberal" structure of Western capitalism and the structure of the capitalist factory. At the same time, some of the deep-seated features of the relations existing in the modern factory between the workers, the unions, and management have been brutally brought to light. In the Standard strike, the following features are clearly apparent: the degree of spontaneous organization among the workers, their assertive attitude toward how production is to be organized, and management's inability to have effective control over the factory.

### The Role of the Shop Stewards

The role played by the *shop stewards*<sup>1</sup> during the Standard strike makes it necessary for us to give a short explanation of this form of organization among English workers, for it has no equivalent form in France (where the shop delegates have been completely integrated into the apparatus of the trade unions).

English shop stewards are in fact independent of the trade unions. They are elected by each factory department; they can be recalled by a simple meeting of the department's workers through a vote of no confidence, in which case a new

steward is elected immediately. These stewards conduct most of the negotiations with management over daily conflicts concerning production, norms, rates, etc. In fact, the unions' role tends to be reduced to that of formulating, once a year, demands on base wage rates. In England, as elsewhere, base wage rates bear little relation to the workers' actual wages, and as time passes this relation is becoming more and more remote.

The shop stewards' movement appeared in England toward the end of the First World War. Between the two wars, it was the constant source of conflict in the struggle between workers and capitalists. The latter refused to recognize the stewards and dismissed them as soon as they could; and since they were forced to meet with them often, they took advantage of the first relaxation in working-class pressure to go back on the offensive. During the Second World War, however, the capitalists were forced to realize that it would be impossible to increase production if they did not recognize the shop stewards; and England's fate depended upon such production increases. In this way, the stewards finally achieved a semilegal status. At present, the workers would consider any attack upon the stewards as an attack upon the trade-union movement and elementary democratic rights.

The trade unions theoretically control the shop stewards' movement since they issue the stewards a certificate testifying to their qualifications. But in fact there is not a single example in which a union has refused to recognize a steward elected by the workers (in France, as is well known, delegates are practically appointed by the unions, and the workers are called upon only to vote for a particular union). The shop stewards' de facto independence is clearly expressed when strikes occur. As the trade unions are opposed most of the time to striking, the stewards get things moving by calling a strike as the men have been asking for; then they make for the union and ask that the strike be "recognized" (which allows the workers to receive strike benefits from the large funds the unions have at their disposal). Then the union almost invariably will say that this is impossible and will ask that the steward persuade the men to go back to work. The steward will call a meeting of the men, for form's sake, and then return to the union to explain that nothing can be done. Most of the time, the union will give in and recognize the strike. If it does not give in, the stewards, as a general rule, will continue their action paying no attention to the union.<sup>2</sup>

But the most characteristic aspect of the shop stewards' movement is that it tends to go beyond the shop level and to be organized on a much vaster scale, at the industrywide and regional levels. Regular, but completely unofficial, meetings of shop stewards from all four corners of the country take place in most large sectors of industry; on occasion, the stewards of all branches of industry in a given region will hold joint meetings. After many years of not knowing about this or pretending not to know about it, the bourgeois press now has been brought around to taking notice of it. One can read in the English newspapers of March 5 that on Saturday, March 3, an (unofficial) committee meeting of shop stewards in the automobile industry had taken place in Birmingham; these stewards had voted on a resolution blaming the government for being directly responsible for the crisis situation in the automobile industry, calling on the auto-

mobile workers to hold meetings and mass demonstrations on March 26, and inviting the representatives of workers in other industries affected by the government's economic policy to join with them; they also decided to call a special conference of automobile industry shop stewards in Birmingham on April 22. Similarly, as soon as the problem of automation was posed on a practical level, the shop stewards, ignoring the grandiloquent and Platonic resolutions voted by the trade unions, set up contacts on a national scale. On May 28, the papers took note of a national conference of shop stewards in the machine-tool and other related industries held in London on Sunday, May 27. This conference demanded

full consultation at shop-floor level before the introduction of new technical advances . . . increased production to be reflected in higher earnings. . . . Employers were warned that unless they take account of these demands, they could expect all-out resistance.

The unanimously adopted motion declared:

We are not opposed to the introduction of new technological advances, but insist that full consultation with the workers should take place at shop-floor level prior to their introduction. We are determined to safeguard the workers involved and to fight for a higher standard of living as a result of automation, full consultation, no redundancy, workers to receive full wages pending satisfactory settlement of the problems in the plant, a shorter work week, and three weeks' annual holiday.<sup>3</sup>

It undoubtedly would be wrong to think that the shop stewards' movement is *entirely* independent of the trade-union bureaucracy. Some of these stewards at the same time are active trade unionists, and among those there are some who try to get the workers to accept the union's line. But the fact that they can be recalled at any moment prevents them from being able to do so systematically or on issues the workers consider important. However that may be, we need only compare the stewards' actual conduct in the great majority of cases, or the automation resolution quoted here, with the general attitude and the constant babbling of the trade unions in order to understand that the shop stewards' movement and the trade-union bureaucracy are in fact divided by a class line.

### **Real Power in the Factory and the Workers' Self-managerial Attitude**

As soon as such an organizational form comes into being — despite its partial and informal character, the maneuvers of the trade-union bureaucracy, and the enormous weight of the means at capitalism's disposal in the factory and in society — the power of the modern proletariat appears in the fact that capitalist management no longer is the undisputed master in its "own house." United around the shop stewards, the workers in many cases will refuse to carry out unconditionally the orders from the offices [*bureaux*]; in the conflicts that arise daily within the production process, a perpetually unstable and shifting compromise is

achieved at every instant between the management line and the workers' collective resistance. The following two examples show that with a certain level of organization and combativeness on the workers' part and without barricades or soviets, what is more or less in question is the very power of capitalists within the factory.

In 1954, Standard's management enacted a series of regulations concerning the activities and the rights of shop stewards—which by itself shows already the degree of permanent, ongoing tension that has existed in the firm. The stewards paid heed only to the parts they found to their liking. In December 1954, management dismissed three stewards for failing to comply with these regulations. The factory's 11,000 workers went out on strike, and after a few days management capitulated and rehired the stewards.

The second example comes from the series of actions that began at Standard this past March. At the beginning of March, before there were any disputes over automation, Standard decided to cut automobile production, which had surpassed demand, and to introduce a rotation system that involved laying off in turns 250 workers a day. Through a vote by the stewards, the workers responded by proposing an alternative method of achieving the desired reduction in production: a 36-hour work week with the same pay. Under threat of strike, a compromise with management was reached.

Still more characteristic was the attitude of the workers and stewards when the problem of layoffs due to the introduction of automation in the Banner Lane tractor factory came up at the end of April. Management had announced at the outset its intention to lay off 2,500 workers temporarily while the factory was being reorganized through automation; later on, it raised this figure to 2,900 and announced at the same time that it would turn down any plan to reduce the workday. The firm's 11,000 workers then went on strike, and the stewards presented a plan aimed at avoiding the layoff of any workers that in fact amounted to a reorganization of the factory's production plans.

They proposed three basic changes. First, some of the workers would be assigned to produce parts common to both the present and the new model. Some of these parts would be used as spare part stocks for the old model, and the rest would serve as components that could be used later for the new model. Second, production should also resume right away at full volume on jobs already retooled and those that can quickly be retooled. Third, the rest of the displaced workers in the tractor factory should be absorbed by the automobile factory. Work in the latter factory should be organized around three short shifts in place of the usual combination of one long dayshift and one short nightshift. To management's claim that this would mean tripling the number of foremen and the rest of the nonproductive personnel, the strike committee responded that the foremen could work on two long shifts against the men's three short shifts; they added that, in any case, "it does not really matter whether the supervisors above charge-hand level are there or not because the incentive bonus scheme stimulates the work."<sup>4</sup>

Beyond these specific proposals, what is important here is the workers' and

stewards' self-managerial attitude. They adopt the point of view of how to organize the entire production process in the factory, and they are led to do this by necessity so that they can respond in concrete terms to the capitalist organization of the factory and counter the damages it entails for them.

### The Attitude of the Trade Unions

Since April of this year, resolutions "congratulating" the workers for their resistance to layoffs,<sup>5</sup> threatening the employers with strikes,<sup>6</sup> etc., have followed one after another at the various annual Trades-Union Congresses and at meetings of their governing bodies. But in point of fact, the trade unions—the official leadership bodies—have done all they could to avoid having the problem placed on the terrain of a real struggle of the workers against the capitalists. After a series of contradictory and evasive statements, at last their attitude was clearly expressed by Mr. J. Crawford, a member of the Trades-Union Congress,

When it comes to laying down union policies in regard to automation the talks must be conducted by men at the top level, not by shop stewards. . . . Otherwise, we will have anarchy creeping in.<sup>7</sup>

During the April-May strike, the trade unions had succeeded, through a series of delaying tactics, in avoiding taking any position on the strike. But they were not able to get by so easily after it was over.

When, on May 31, Standard's management announced the permanent dismissal of 2,600 workers, the trade-union secretary of the Coventry district declared that his union was "greatly shocked" by the news. The same day, the factory's shop stewards decided to demand that the trade unions officially call the workers out on strike. The stewards' prudent attitude may be explained by how the situation had changed since April: Standard was in the process of reducing car production, and a portion of the laid-off workers had been working at the company's automobile factory; the strike might be long, and the workers could not hold on without the financial support of the trade unions. The union leadership was to meet on June 3 to decide its position. This meeting was then postponed until June 6. When the meeting finally took place, the union leaders declared unanimously that they were against striking. "Instead of a strike," the *Manchester Guardian* innocently noted on June 7, "the unions . . . have asked the Minister of Labour to call a meeting of all concerned" to discuss the situation. The minister of labour, Mr. MacLeod, actually received these union leaders on June 7, only to declare that "whether or not there was sufficient work in a particular firm to keep on all its workers was for the firm to decide."

No doubt the workers at Standard and elsewhere can appreciate the true value of this tangible outcome of "top-level discussions."

### Automation and the Capitalist Economy

What is automation and what does it consist of in Standard's case? The word is

vague and covers over a complex and confused reality. There is nothing revolutionary about the techniques Standard has introduced, when they are taken separately. As far as we can tell, they involve a battery of "semiautomated" machines (which have already been in use at Renault for years) and a certain degree of automatic control over production through electronic means. There are no absolutely new inventions at the basis of the reorganization of the Banner Lane factory. For years, research has been done on these new "automatic" processes, and there have been some partial applications in a host of industrial sectors. Then suddenly, it became technically possible and economically feasible *totally* to reorganize a factory on the basis of these processes, simply by extending their application as far as possible in each individual sector and by rethinking how they can be incorporated into one production assembly unit through methods that are themselves "automated." The revolutionary aspect of "automation" today consists in its ability to make a tabula rasa of the factory's previous organization and to apply en masse in every department the processes and the machines that were till then utilized only partially and sporadically.

Now, the application of new processes on a hitherto unknown scale not only gives the "automated" factory a qualitatively new structure but poses on a societywide scale tremendous problems that from the outset put the pseudoliberal organization of Western capitalism into question.

The first of these problems obviously results from the technological unemployment of workers pushed out of "automated" factories. "Automation" appears to result in enormous savings of labor power. In Standard's case, it seems that production will increase more than 40 percent while personnel will be reduced on the order of 50 percent. That is equivalent to an increase in labor productivity of more than 180 percent and signifies that the past level of production now can be attained with a third of the manpower previously employed.

Obviously, this does not mean that total unemployment will increase exactly in proportion to the number of workers laid off. On the one hand, employment ought to increase in the factories that make this new equipment, that maintain it, replace it at the end of its productive life, etc., and this increase in employment will have secondary repercussions in industries that produce consumer goods for these workers. On the other hand, capitalist accumulation does not immediately take the form of full investment in "automated" factories; it continues, for the most part, to take place in the form in which investments today are made, where each \$10 million invested in new equipment creates, let us say, a demand for a thousand new workers. We cannot go here into the complex problems that are posed in this connection. The final net outcome will depend on a number of factors that involve not only the degree of labor-power savings realized by new inventions, the extent of investments required, the rate of accumulation and its distribution among traditional and new investments, but also in the long run all the important features of the capitalist economy. Just as it would be wrong to think that the unemployment resulting from automation will be exactly equivalent to the number of workers initially laid off,<sup>8</sup> it would also be wrong to say that capitalist production automatically will create an equivalent number of new jobs.<sup>9</sup>

Even setting aside the question of what the overall level of unemployment resulting from automation will be, one thing, however, is certain: Unemployment awaits the workers who are directly affected. From the abstract economic point of view, there might be an equal number of workers laid off by Standard and taken in at the same time by the electronic equipment, machine-tool, or even the chemical-products industries. From a real point of view, however, things do not work this way at all. New jobs created elsewhere due to the existence of automation itself or to the general expansion of the capitalist economy will not be in the same locality, nor will they require the same skills. Moreover, only a small proportion of the workers who were there before will fill the jobs remaining in the “automated” factory, since these jobs are now of a different nature. As the *Manchester Guardian* said, paraphrasing Marx (probably without knowing it), “What help is it for a laid-off mechanic from Coventry to know that there are jobs open for bus conductors in Edinburgh?”<sup>10</sup>

The problems the worker will encounter are practically insurmountable. The feat involved for the individual worker to acquire a skill, find lodging, and then move in cannot easily be repeated twice in a lifetime. From the capitalist point of view, these considerations cannot be taken into account; a firm cannot base its equipment and production on the principle of keeping its present workers employed. It is in the autocratic logic of capitalist production to treat the worker as just another commodity, which ought to move about in order to meet demand and transform itself in order to answer the requirements set by economic demand. That the object of this displacement or of this transformation is the very person of the worker does not change the matter one bit. At the limit, if the worker cannot be transformed so as to conform to the exigencies of this mechanical universe, which is in a state of permanent upheaval, his fate cannot and should not be different from that of any other instrument of production that becomes outmoded before becoming completely worn down: He is simply discarded.

In the past, this was the way capitalism “settled” the problem of technological unemployment. But what was possible in the nineteenth century is no longer possible with the proletariat of today. Its actual power within society today prevents one from merely saying that the workers should just pull themselves up by their own bootstraps or else die of hunger. Present-day capitalists know that under such circumstances the workers might raise themselves up in a completely different manner. The problems posed by the relocation of laid-off workers—lodgings in another locality, new training, paying for all these things—can be faced only on the national level and they call for State action. In Western capitalist societies, this state of affairs can only give new momentum to the efforts of State and trade-union bureaucracies to intervene concretely at specific points in the organization of the economy.

It is only too natural then that the Labour party’s daily paper, the *Daily Mirror*, published on May 8 a multicolumn, center-page “10-point plan for the second industrial revolution.” Starting from the principle that “unless there is political planning, there will be industrial chaos,” the Labour newspaper demanded that the Government provide funds so that laid-off workers can move

to other localities, that it furnish them with the necessary housing, that it cover the training expenses of workers who have to learn new skills, that it set up "expert mobile teams" to attack the problems created in various regions by the introduction of automation,<sup>11</sup> etc.

Much more characteristic is the great liberal daily paper, the *Manchester Guardian*, which not only adopts this point of view completely and insists that only the State can assure a solution to the problems created by the introduction of automation, but goes so far as to write,

We might take a leaf here from the Soviet book. Discussing yesterday how the Russians dealt with the problem of "automation," Mr. S. Babayants, a leader of the Russian engineering unions on a visit to this country, said that new machines meant no loss to the workers, for those replaced were trained on full pay for other jobs before any change took place.

"Individual managements," the paper continues,

have an obvious responsibility for such training, but clearly they cannot be expected to shoulder full responsibility for it. If we had a national scheme of this sort, there would be far less fear of "redundancy." . . . This is the kind of help that the unions should now be demanding from the Government, and it is the kind of help that should be given.

For the time being, the conservative government has restricted itself to launching appeals for calm and to declaring that "the area of manpower is in essence an issue that ought not to be determined by the Government." But this attitude can be maintained only so long as the introduction of new methods remains limited in extent. The inevitable expansion of automation will oblige the Tories to throw their "ideology" overboard (it won't be the first time) or to stand aside.

### **Automation and the Capitalist Factory**

But the effects automation has on the structure of the capitalist factory, on the concrete relations of production, and on the daily activity of the workers have a still greater impact.

From May 14 to 17 a conference on automation, organized by the European Productivity Agency, took place in London. We present here the statements of one of the participants, Mr. Serge Colomb, a technician at Renault in Paris, as they were reported by the English newspapers.<sup>12</sup> They take on their full significance when it is remembered that the trade unions brought together by the EPA are anything but "subversive."

After having recalled that Renault had launched its own automation program in 1947 and that since that year the factory's labor force had increased 15 percent and production 300 percent, Mr. Colomb continued, saying,



It has not been possible to attain a state of equilibrium in the redeployment of the labor force. The number of workers downgraded by automation techniques is higher than that of the new posts created and often requirements for the latter are such that the new men must be recruited from other categories.

The gap between production and training is another key problem of automation. The company's apprenticeship scheme was taken unawares and was unable to foresee three years in advance what the works would need. A few years ago milling machine hands, fitters and turners were required. Now the need is for machine setters and other different sorts of workmen.

Hours worked are not reduced and although somewhat better paid, the workers in sections which have turned over to automation have not received the advantages announced by the automation prophets. The workers' isolation in the midst of complicated machinery may have very serious repercussions and accentuate the dehumanization of the work felt all the more in the absence of hard physical labor.

As for wages, Mr. Colomb said that obviously it was not possible to make use of piece-rate wages or bonuses, since the machines determine the rate of work. The company had to go ahead with an extensive reevaluation of various jobs and to set up a wide range of new wage scales.

This astonishing declaration requires little comment. Here we have a technician in a capitalist factory. We must pay tribute to his honesty, which, in a few sober lines, demolishes the entire mythology of capitalist "progress." We should merely emphasize the significance of the information he provides on wages. Automation removes yet another "objective" basis from wage disparities. Management reacts by going ahead with an "extensive reevaluation of various jobs"—this is the increasingly widespread practice of initiating "job audits"—which obviously cannot help but be arbitrary, for they are designed for one purpose alone: maintaining divisions among the workers.

In order to understand the effects automation has on the concrete structure of the capitalist factory, we must grasp the social function it is called upon to fulfill in an exploitative society and its place in the history of capital-labor relations.

Considered in the abstract, the major technical changes in the field of production in capitalist society appear as the result of a relatively "autonomous" technological evolution, and their employment in production appears as the result of an application of an equally "autonomous" principle of profitability, i.e., independent of all social considerations. In fact, the application of these changes en masse to industry takes on an extremely precise social content; bluntly speaking, it almost always constitutes a moment in the class struggle, a capital offensive against labor, considered as the originating force in production. At each stage in the development of capitalist society (which begins by corrupting everything and bringing everything into its service), technical changes are the sole, apparently conclusive means of "disciplining" the workers; this is done by at-

tacking the worker's living productive forces. In each instance a faculty of some sort is wrung from the worker and incorporated into the machinery. Unable to tolerate the workers' ongoing resistance, capital distorts the technique when applying it in the production process and subordinates it to the pursuit of its own utopian goal: the elimination of man *qua* man from the sphere of production. But at every stage, this attempted elimination of the human element again and again proves impossible to achieve: The new technique cannot be applied en masse unless millions of workers adapt themselves to it; this new technique itself opens up new possibilities that cannot be exploited unless the workers collaborate in the process of applying it within the sphere of production. Sooner or later the concrete dialectic of human action in production—of technique and of class struggle—brings to the fore the predominant element in the modern production process: the proletariat.

Thus the technological revolution that took place around the time of the First World War (with the introduction of semiautomatic machinery and assembly lines) appeared to capital as the initial stage in finally ridding itself of skilled workers. The capitalists thought they would be left with a mass of "unskilled brutes" with whom they could do as they pleased. Twenty years later, they had to stop singing this tune: The universal application of these new processes had culminated in the creation of a mass of semiskilled workers, homogeneous and disciplined *on its own behalf*. Now that narrow occupational skills have disappeared, the creation of this well-organized mass of workers is of decisive importance for the evolution of the production process since this mass of workers is all the more ready and able to resolve the problem of workers' management of production. In fact, capitalism proves to be much less capable of disciplining the proletariat of 1955 than that of 1905 *in production as well as in society*. It only succeeds in this thanks to the trade-union and political bureaucracy.

It is within this context that the application of the techniques of automation will acquire its true meaning. We easily could go back and show the links leading from the "economic" and "technical" imperatives imposed upon business firms to the historical signification of this movement tending toward increased automation. But what concerns us here is this historical meaning itself. What the application of automation objectively aims at in the present era is the replacement of every one hundred semiskilled workers with a score of "unskilled brutes" and a score of "salaried professionals." But what we now know about automation in its actual application (at Renault, for example) shows us that, put in contact with semiautomated machinery, unskilled workers and some skilled workers tend to appropriate for themselves the "know-how" that is involved in applying these new methods.<sup>13</sup> In particular, we now know too that what seems to make sense for an individual firm becomes an absurdity on the larger scale of capitalism as a whole.

Applied to production as a whole, this transformation would end up giving a majority of workers a greater technological education [*culture*]. Barring its ability to throw 60 percent of the population out of work, capitalism will then have

to face a still more skilled, more conscious, and more intractable proletarian mass than exists at the present time.

### Notes

1. T/E: Castoriadis uses the French phrase *délégués d'atelier* followed by “shop stewards” in italics and parentheses.

2. This is what happened in several large strikes in 1954 and 1955; see “The English Dockworkers’ Strikes.” [T/E: “Les Grèves des dockers anglais” (*EMO* 1, 305-32) is not included in the present edition.]

3. *Manchester Guardian*, May 28, 1956. [T/E: In his translation, Castoriadis uses the French phrase *à la base*, followed by the English phrase “at shop-floor level” in italics and in parentheses.]

4. *Times* (London), May 3, 1956.

5. Amalgamated Engineering Union, in *Manchester Guardian*, April 25, 1956.

6. Electrical Trades Union, in *Manchester Guardian*, May 16, 1956.

7. *Manchester Guardian*, May 18, 1956. [T/E: Castoriadis writes the English phrase “men at the top level” in italics and in parenthesis, following his translation of this phrase into French.]

8. If that were so, unemployment during the last century and a half would have reached unimaginable proportions.

9. Thus, the *Economist* on May 12 (p. 592), after having rejected the idea “generally being advanced today”—by capitalists and their spokespeople—according to which “the short-term effects of automation must inevitably be painful, but in the long run automation will equally inevitably create more jobs,” proposes to replace this idea with a “revised, honest version” (!) which “might run like this, ‘One thing is certain, for our comfort: automation cannot occur without the effective demand—probably widely distributed—to buy the extra goods.’” The *Economist*’s sole justification for this idea is that a company will go ahead with costly new investments that involve automation only insofar as it *expects* an increase in sales. But this expectation will not necessarily be fulfilled, and it is far from being the sole reason for introducing automation. Most of the time both production increases *and* personnel reductions occur; automation can be introduced even in the face of stagnant demand, simply in order to reduce costs. Moreover, within the context of a technological revolution, increases in actual demand have no necessary connection with employment increases; demand can increase and employment can decline precisely because the new technique makes it possible for a given level of production to be attained—and a corresponding level of demand satisfied—with a *different* (lesser) quantity of labor. It is hard to say to what extent the *Economist* wants to deceive others and to what extent it is just deceiving itself.

10. T/E: *Manchester Guardian*, June 7, 1956. We have translated Castoriadis’s wording of the *Guardian* editorial. The original editorial says, “The fact that there may be vacancies for fifty bus conductors and fifty dustmen does not necessarily solve the problem of a hundred men who lose their jobs in a tractor plant.” It appears Castoriadis has accidentally combined this statement with a paragraph in the *Daily Mirror*’s “10-point plan for the Robot Revolution” (see three paragraphs below), which reads, “It is no use telling a man in Coventry that there is a job waiting for him in Glasgow unless he can be assured that he will be able to get a home, school places for his children, and money to help him move.”

11. “Every team should include one trade-union expert . . .” to look into the more specifically working-class aspects of these problems, perhaps? Not at all: “. . . who can iron out the difficulties if a man has to join a new union.” The Labour party bureaucracy has not forgotten which way is up, nor has it forgotten that it needs to protect its hunting grounds. [T/E: Again, with the “10-point plan for the second industrial revolution,” we have translated Castoriadis’s translation; the *Mirror* actually calls this plan a “10-point plan for the Robot Revolution,” though it mentions the “Second Industrial Revolution” in point six.]

12. *Manchester Guardian*, May 18, 1956.

13. A. Touraine’s recent book, *L’Evolution du travail ouvrier aux usines Renault* (Paris: CNRS, 1955), makes this point clearly.

As for the cows, their number certainly is a political question—not in itself, but as it relates to the people who raise them, milk them, and eat them; in other words, as it relates to the real relations of production and consumption in society. Likewise, these relations have to be conjured away in K.'s report, too; people appear in this report only as bureaucrats who are charged with supervising the execution of the plan and who happen to exercise their control badly. They simultaneously supervise too much and not enough (K. could not see in this a fundamental contradiction in the regime and in the class he represents without ceasing to exist).

It is obvious that Stalinist ideology, like the extreme form of terror characteristic of Stalin's reign, had become an unbearable fetter upon the development of Russian society and of the bureaucracy itself; the whole Russian "turnabout" today bears witness to this. At the moment it feels its real cohesion as an exploiting class assured, the bureaucracy has much less need of internal ideological cohesion. It resents Stalin's Marxism-for-backward-seminary-students as a yoke and tries to rid itself of it. The trouble is that the same process that culminated in the consolidation and unification of the bureaucracy has consecrated at the same time its total break with the Russian proletariat. Just when the former is able to assert its authority, the latter explodes and the freedom won on one side is lost thrice over on the other. The repudiation of ideological monolithism proves to be both desirable and indispensable, but the class contradiction running through Russian society prevents anything else from being put in its place.

Denunciations of ideological sterility are to be found throughout the speeches of the Twentieth Congress along with criticism of economic shortcomings. Khrushchev and other members of the leadership launch numerous appeals to intellectuals, to economists, to historians, to philosophers, to artists. They criticize their "dogmatism," their "mania for quotations," their "detachment from life," and invite them to look at the present and future—notifying them, in a word, that they are hereby ordered to create spontaneously and authentically.

Why then don't they set the example?

Khrushchev and the other rulers criticize Russian economists, accusing them of sterility, mechanical repetition, etc. They reproach them for holding to a few traditional schemata in their economic analyses. But what is the "analysis" of the capitalist economy offered by K. in his report? A comparison of the rate of development between the industry of bourgeois countries and that of Russia. From this he deduces that the latter is developing much more rapidly than the former. He uses a few figures concerning real wages in capitalist countries, showing that they are increasing slowly or not at all. In sum, he gives the most superficial and schematic sort of description; instead of real economic *analysis*, we find the crudest version of the so-called underconsumption theory (which was explicitly repudiated by this very same Lenin whom he never ceases to invoke), namely, that the crisis of capitalism is to be explained by the stagnation of working-class wages and by the resulting restriction of market outlets.

One might argue that Khrushchev is not, nor is he obliged to be, an economist. But Russian economists themselves are obliged to be economists; at the

very least, K. wants to oblige them to become economists. What should they, what can they, say about capitalism? Khrushchev repudiates Stalin's so-called schematism and invokes Lenin to prove that capitalist production may still make progress. He thus takes away from the economists the possibility of presenting one of the systems as absolute stagnation, the other as absolute progress. Should they compare relative rates of development then? But for how long a period of time? From the figures cited by K. himself it follows that the annual rate of expansion for industrial production in Russia was 20 percent from 1929 to 1937, 18 percent from 1946 to 1950, 13 percent from 1950 to 1955, and it will be 10.5 percent from 1955 to 1960. This slowdown proves what we have always said, namely, that to the extent that the Russian figures are not already in part inflated, they express the rapid advance of a country where tremendous masses of people have been transferred from agriculture to industry, where the low level of technical progress allows improved methods of production that have been perfected elsewhere to be put to use right from the start, where an unprecedented rate of exploitation allows for a very rapid accumulation of capital, and where the State's control over investment eliminates the underemployment of men and machines that was due to market fluctuations.<sup>6</sup> But at the same time, it shows that the differences in expansion rates are becoming less and less impressive. In fact, the annual increase of industrial production in capitalist countries already has matched and sometimes has exceeded those achieved in Russia: 22 percent in the United States from 1939 to 1943, 11 percent in West Germany from 1951 to 1955, 10 percent in Italy from 1948 to 1955. The difference between Good and Evil can be symbolized by the difference between zero and something, but it is difficult to incarnate it somewhere between 8 and 10 percent.

A comparative analysis of the two economic systems shows in fact that the bureaucratic economy does not increase labor productivity faster than the capitalist economy does. In the long run, its advantage is reduced to its ability to eliminate overproduction crises.

And for K., it is indeed to "crises" that capitalism's contradictions revert. What can Russian economists say about them—since obviously it is impossible to speak to these economists about the fundamental contradiction of capitalism, whether in its private or bureaucratic form, which consists of treating the subject of production as an object? K. teaches them that these crises are due to the fact that wages are not increasing. This conception, let it be said in passing, traditionally was one of the ideological bases for reformism; it leads to the conclusion that if the workers extract a sufficient amount of wage increases, they will help capitalism overcome its crises. Irrespective of this, it is theoretically false; if accumulation grows at a sufficiently rapid pace, wage increases are not in the least a prerequisite for continued capitalist expansion. And saying that the private capitalist economy cannot assure a stable rate of accumulation is not socialism but quite simply Statism. The "nationalization of investment," under one form or another, was the banner of Keynesian neocapitalists and remains so. And indeed, K's conception is factually incorrect; if Russian economists were to

rid themselves of “schematism,” they might very well discover that wages have been increasing for a century.

The workers have not for all that stopped making economic demands, and they have done so in an increasingly emphatic manner, usually forcing the capitalists to back down so that the division of the gross product between wages and profits has remained nearly constant throughout the history of capitalism. Under another form, the same thing is in the process of occurring in Russia. But this has not lessened tensions in the capitalist factory—just as lowered prices in Russia have not lessened tensions in the Russian factory, as the Twentieth Congress itself bears witness to from start to finish. This proves that the real problem lies elsewhere. It lies in the workers’ rejection of capitalist production relations within which they are dominated by a stratum of managers who personify capital. Here we have the origin of the crisis of labor productivity in the modern factory—in Detroit as in Coventry, in Billancourt as in Stalingrad. Can Russian economists talk about that?

Can they talk truthfully about the Russian economy? They certainly can continue accumulating pages full of meaningless statistics and describing the administrative apparatus of the economy—in short, they can jabber away, as Mr. Charles Bettelheim does in France, in order to say nothing. Suslov, flushed with excitement, asks them to talk about the law of value—but adds immediately that what matters is to reduce production costs. But the law of value leads to the question of surplus value—of how the social product should be distributed among various social categories. Even if the economists continue to bury the bureaucracy’s income within the total “wage” bill, any analysis of the Russian economy from the point of view of value, no matter how exacting, would not fail to bring to light the State’s—i.e., the bureaucracy’s—tremendous spoliation of the peasantry. How is the distribution of social income determined? Who determines it? Before it is distributed, value has to be produced. How is it to be produced—in other words, how is the Russian factory organized? Who directs it? Do its laws differ from those pertaining to the capitalist factory as described by Marx? To pose the most trifling of these questions is to shatter the whole “socialist” mythology of the bureaucracy. Russian economists are not about to do that.

If Khrushchev is not an economist, he is, by profession, a politician. It is in this capacity that he has advanced the concept of the “different roads to socialism,” which has been greeted by “Communists” as an important contribution to Marxist political analysis. The immediate political meaning of this orientation is certainly clear: It sanctifies for the CPs an expanded freedom to maneuver, thus allowing them to adapt their line one way or another to the requirements of “peaceful coexistence” at the same time that it creates the appearance of greater autonomy for the satellite countries. In this regard, it undeniably has some value from the bureaucracy’s point of view.

But what is the underlying theoretical conception, what is the value of the argument that justifies it? K. begins by saying in effect that there are different conditions in different countries—a seemingly innocuous tautology under

which, as usual, lies hidden a sophism. For the question is not whether the existence of different countries signifies the existence of different conditions but whether these conditions are different enough to render a revolution necessary in one place and superfluous elsewhere. Countries are different—but at the same time they are all *capitalist* countries. The paths undeniably will be different—but they will all be paths to *socialism*. If these paths are *passages from capitalism to socialism*, in every case important consequences follow therefrom. What are they? For a Marxist, this “passage” signified essentially one thing: the destruction of the existing State power and the State apparatus, its replacement by a State that already would not really be one any longer, for it would be nothing but the working population in arms. Lenin wrote hundreds of pages intended to show that the essence of the passage from capitalism to socialism was the abolition of the State as an organ separated from the proletarian masses. On the fundamental *identity* of these “paths,” which is at the same time the identity of the *content* of socialism where it is achieved, K. carefully says nothing.

Instead, he invokes Lenin, who admitted the possibility of a peaceful evolution of the Russian Revolution . . . *in April 1917*, i.e., *after* a first victorious insurrection and *in terms of* the existence of soviets, the working class’s organs of power. At the same time, he conjures away the fact that Lenin himself quickly drew lessons from the situation as it was developing and moving toward a second proletarian insurrection. He conjures away the fact that Lenin, who at the time was writing *State and Revolution* and quoting Marx (who spoke of the need for every revolution on the Continent to smash the State apparatus), took care to explain that the exception Marx made in the case of England was based on the fact that in this country, in 1871, militarism and “to a considerable degree even the bureaucracy,” did not exist. K. also conjures away the fact that Lenin added that “today” (in 1917) both England and America can be characterized as militaristic-bureaucratic States, the “destruction,” the “smashing to pieces” of which will be the “essential feature” of every “real revolution.” There is no need to point out how much more compelling this idea has become today, with the monstrous growth of the State apparatus and its growing involvement with the apparatus of exploitation.

Omitting all analysis of the State’s structure and role in contemporary societies, Khrushchev invokes some intervening historical “changes.” The modification of the relation of forces in favor of the working class “of various capitalist countries” (?) should allow the working class to “win a solid majority in legislatures” and to transform this majority “into an instrument of genuine popular will.” But when Lenin treated as social traitors those who, before K., had supported this “orientation,” it was not because they had claimed that they would be able to install socialism through parliamentary means . . . while being minorities in legislative assemblies. The reformists Lenin characterized as “bootlicking lackeys of imperialism” claimed that the “relation of forces” one day would allow for the peaceful passage to socialism through the conquest of a legislative majority. In opposing this line, Lenin confined himself to the use of “conjunctural” arguments, showing that it is impossible for a legislative assembly to reflect the will of the majority of the population in a bourgeois country (to

which we could add, given the historical experience of the last thirty years, that wherever a “socialist” or “socialist-communist” legislative majority has been put together, it has done nothing but preserve the bourgeois order). He demonstrated, through a sociological analysis of the nature of the State and of legislative assemblies, that the latter could not be the instrument for the passage to socialism, that it was based on a radical separation between the people and its “representatives,” who are consubstantial with the exploitative regime, and that socialism can only begin with the total destruction of the existing State apparatus and the institution of the power of the armed masses. But Khrushchev cannot say that the nature of the capitalist State and of legislative assemblies has changed since Lenin’s time, and he does not want to say that what has changed is the nature of socialism—that what he understands by socialism is only the power of the bureaucrats of Communist parties, who indeed conceivably can be placed in power through parliamentary means—with the aid of the weight of the “powerful camp of socialist countries and their 900 million inhabitants.”

Moreover, at the same time he harshly denounces the sterility of historians, Khrushchev unintentionally offers them an example of how not to write history: This example is to be found in his “explanations” of the “personality cult” and in particular in his “secret report,” where he attributes to Stalin, and to Stalin alone, all the liabilities on the bureaucracy’s balance sheet.

In his article published elsewhere in this issue [see note 4], Claude Lefort tells us what to make of this “reverse personality cult” that ends up blaming a single individual for all the “errors” and “crimes” of an entire historical era. We can never insist too strongly, however, on the following point: The low level of historical methodology found in this report has not been seen in the West for the past twenty-five centuries. Boiled down, the report affirms the following: For a quarter of a century the history of a nation of 200 million individuals and thereby the whole of humanity has been determined essentially by the “delusions of grandeur,” the “morbid suspicion,” and the “persecution mania” of a single individual. The editors of *Paris Match* magazine would hesitate to offer such a notion to their readers.

Of course we are not going to adopt Khrushchev’s methodology and explain the quality of his report by his stupidity, his ignorance, or his superficiality. Were Khrushchev Thucydides, his report could not be any different. Faced with the impossible task of repudiating certain traits of the system—which have been and to a large extent continue to be its organic and necessary products—in order to better preserve the system itself, he could do nothing but present these traits as accidental. And in history accidents have individual names.

It will be said, however, You are taking this report for something other than what it is; you are judging on a theoretical plane a speech that is only a political exercise intended to demolish the myth of Stalin for some reason or another. We are saying precisely that: The bureaucracy can no longer maintain any consistency between its political operations and a theoretical system. In treating all his opponents as agents of Hitler, Stalin tried to force everything into a delirious framework that bore no relation to reality as a whole or in the least of



its details. But this delirium had consistency. In demolishing Stalin, Khrushchev can demystify only through further mystifications, he can get his political line adopted only by destroying in near-flagrant fashion the worldview that in other respects this line is claiming to serve. Once it has removed the protective leaden coat of Stalinism, the bureaucracy can only don the motley costume of a Harlequin.

It is hardly necessary to start going through the endless series of questions raised by this explanation of history in terms of the vices of Stalin the individual. We need only pull a thread to see this costume fall to pieces. Given who Khrushchev said Stalin was, what was the Politburo doing at the time? And the Central Committee? The Party Congress? The people, in "the most perfect" democracy on earth? What kind of regime is this in which an individual can act in such a fashion? What keeps Khrushchev from having his own attack of craziness tomorrow? What really has changed? What is this Twentieth Congress of 1,355 voting marionettes and 81 advisory marionettes where no one poses such questions? Why, if these things are important, should they not be discussed in public? Who believes that Beria was an imperialist agent? What forms of "socialist legality" have Khrushchev and his clique observed when, the day after the Congress, he had Bagirov and his crew shot? Who believes that the present leaders were not basically Stalin's accomplices? What is this communist leadership that treats foreign "Communist" parties as if they were not there (according to the confessions of American, English, Italian, and French Stalinists)? What is this strangely *selective* madness of Stalin's, which is expressed only in firing squads, statues erected to himself, and that little drawing-room globe upon which he planned all Russian troop movements during World War II? Wasn't Stalin managing the economy too? Who had the last word on the five-year plans? Those Politburo members who, according to Khrushchev, trembled each time Stalin invited them in—did they recover their courage when it came to discussing the economy, e.g., workers' wages or the living conditions of the peasantry? And this regime of terror and arbitrary rule—did it prevail only among Stalin and his immediate entourage? Was not each member of the CP leadership a little Stalin in his own sphere? And what was happening at the lowest echelons? In the factories? Did the workers have a single word to say? Do they now have a single word to say?

In fact, all these questions have been posed—in Russia, in the satellite countries, and within the Communist parties of the Western countries. Togliatti, even Thorez, in their turn have been obliged to pose a few of them. Khrushchev thus has learned at his own expense that one cannot play with this cult of the personality with impunity—either in one direction or in the other. In the end, the Poznan revolt taught him in a brutal fashion that reality has its own logic, even if the speeches of bureaucrats do not. The July 2 resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), of which it can be said that it was forced upon the Kremlin by the Polish workers (even if the crisis opened up by the Twentieth Congress made it more and more necessary every day), reverts to the times before the "secret report" and expresses a new

hardening of its position. The political effectiveness of this sudden new change in direction, which, no doubt, will be followed by several others, cannot be too great. But what it clearly demonstrates is that the bureaucracy is obliged to nip in the bud the criticism to which it had imagined it could give a little latitude; it is forced to cut short in July a discussion it had itself opened in February. Ideology has repercussions on reality to such a point, and reality is in its turn so explosive that the small margin of freedom the bureaucracy thinks it can grant—both to itself and to its “thinkers”—vanishes the very instant it seems to emerge as a possibility.

The reader should understand that our intention has not been to carry on a polemic with Khrushchev and his colleagues as if they were standing on the terrain of Marxism, and still less to assess their merits as theoreticians, but rather to understand the objective factors that at this time oblige the bureaucracy to abandon Stalinist ideology and at the same time prevent it from replacing this ideology with another one.

The bureaucracy cannot truthfully think either about its own system, since its essence is the exploitation that it is obliged to present as “socialism,” or about traditional capitalism, since that cannot be done without taking up the perspective of a fundamental revolutionizing of social relations—not merely property forms. Due to the fact that private capitalism in the West and bureaucratic capitalism in the East are growing more and more alike, such a perspective would include them both. It therefore puts bureaucracy itself into question.

We have merely tried to stress the profound contradictions that prevent the bureaucracy more and more from setting up a coherent ideology. These contradictions naturally ought to carry the bureaucracy toward the kind of eclecticism that has long characterized bourgeois culture, and which has made its first timid appearance at the Twentieth Congress. But these obviously are not the only factors involved. The totalitarian structure of the system not only, in a mechanical fashion, prevents any independent expression but also (with the relative exception of the exact sciences and the most abstract arts) ensures that everything said in one domain affects all the others. Poznan, once again, bears witness to this.

Capable neither of maintaining Stalin’s ideological monolithism, which the structure of modern Russian society now spurns, nor of indulging in the eclecticism that its necessarily totalitarian organization belies, the bureaucracy can see the day approaching when it will be reduced to silence.

### Notes

1. *Report by N. A. Bulganin . . . to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the Directives of the Sixth Five-Year Plan for the Development of the USSR, 1956-1960*, Soviet News Booklet No. 5 (London, 1956), p. 27.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

3. “Speech by Comrade M. A. Suslov (Suslov speaks on Party Work and Ideology),” *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 8 (April 14, 1956), p. 22. Just as characteristic is how, in imitation of Stalin, speakers christen as “law” the mere statement of facts. Stalin had discovered, by attributing it to Lenin, the “law of capitalism’s unequal development”—a pompous tautology signifying simply that things differ from each other. Khrushchev and others talk of the “law” of heavy industry’s priority

over light industry, the “law” of different countries’ different paths toward socialism, etc. Every time one turns a page of the *Proceedings of the Twentieth Congress*, one expects to come across a “law of cow lactation” or a “law of steel’s durability.”

4. The explicit content, of course. Claude Lefort shows in his article published elsewhere in this issue the actual political content of Khrushchev’s speech—its significance as a moment in the bureaucracy’s struggle against the proletariat and against itself. [Claude Lefort, “Le Totalitarisme sans Staline,” *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956), now is reprinted in Claude Lefort, *Eléments d’une critique de la bureaucratie* (Geneva-Paris: Droz, 1971; 2nd ed., Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 130-90, 155-235, respectively.]

5. Certainly, K. speaks of Communist parties, of alliances with socialists, etc., in various countries. But at no time are classes, parties, or the tendencies and orientations of the opposing camps defined; most of the time, they are *not even mentioned by name*.

6. Underemployment resulting from bureaucratic anarchy is another matter.

## 5

# Curtain on the Metaphysics of the Trials

*And how can it be that a person confesses to crimes which he did not commit? There is only one way: after physical pressure, after torture has been applied, thus bringing him to a state of unconsciousness where he loses his judgment and abandons his human dignity. That is how the confessions were obtained.*

Khrushchev, "Secret Report to the 20th Congress of the CPSU," *Le Monde*, June 9, 1956

Khrushchev is speaking of only some of the trials, and not the most important ones. Those whom he pities are in general his counterparts: true Stalinists who, after having held down the heads of Stalin's victims on the chopping block, hardly had any time to feel the ax lop off their own necks. Postyshev, Kossior, and Antonov-Ovseyenko were caught in the works of the same infernal machine they had helped set up, and which Khrushchev and the present leadership, who were luckier, more cunning, and also perhaps more servile, were able to escape.

Khrushchev speaks only of some of the trials. But his explanation is valid for them all. *In all the trials, confessions were the SOLE "proof."* We now know that they were obtained by torture. Elsewhere Khrushchev expresses his regret that the repression directed against the "Trotskyists, Zinovievists, and Bukharinists" had been pushed too far, and says that a correct policy would have brought them back into the Party. The Trotskyists, Zinovievists, and Bukharinists were condemned after having confessed that they were agents of Hitler, that they were working to unleash war and dismember the USSR, that they had poisoned

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Originally published as "Rideau sur la métaphysique des procès," *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956). Reprinted *SB 2*, pp. 213-30.

workers, that they derailed trains. To say that they should have been brought back into the Party is to say, in the slimy and cowardly manner that is Khrushchev's, that everything was trumped up, that these confessions had been extracted by torture—that therefore these trials too were machinations pure and simple. Indeed, in most of the satellite countries, the trials of Stalinist leaders who previously had “confessed” their treachery—Rajk, Kostov, etc.—have been hastily “revised” and these leaders have been “rehabilitated.”<sup>1</sup>

Nothing remains of the trials.

Nothing remains of the metaphysics that people wanted to erect, based upon their example. Nothing remains of the theory of objective guilt, of agonizing choices between politics and morality, of the crisis in the Marxist dialectic that they were supposed to have expressed.<sup>2</sup> The argument goes as follows: The opposition needed allies, it might have been able to use the kulaks, and the latter might have been able to get beyond their control and succeed in restoring capitalism—*therefore*, opposition culminated objectively in preparations for the restoration of capitalism. This absurd example of sorites bursts apart, leaving us only bits and pieces of the foul concoction cooked up by the prosecutor. Upon it the philosopher had tried to confer a factitious meaning for his own usage.

Factitious, for from the very start the trials were interpreted by situating them in a revolutionary perspective they never shared. The accused had abandoned the terrain of proletarian struggle many long years before: How could the supposed conflicts in Bukharin's or someone else's conscience have expressed a crisis in the Marxist dialectic under such conditions? At the very most, they might have given expression to one of those insoluble antitheses between “morality” and “effectiveness” that belong organically to bourgeois politics. We do not mean to say that a revolutionary politics, by definition, never would find itself faced with insurmountable contradictions, or that for this kind of politics the solution to every possible conflict is guaranteed in advance. But such contradictions appear only in borderline situations; they indicate a stopping point in the development of the revolutionary process, and it is inconceivable that they will persist in the course of its development. To say that the Russian rulers and their opponents were seized by the throat between 1923 and 1939 by a conflict between “morality” and “effectiveness,” between “intentions” and “results,” between “program” and “reality” is to say quite simply that these rulers and their opponents (whatever might have been their “intentions”) no longer were able to place themselves on the terrain of the *objectively* revolutionary problematic (because the configuration of the historical process and the place they had assumed in it prevented them from doing so); it is to say that, after 1923, Russian society was dominated by the fundamental scission between truth and effectiveness, between the internal and the external, between direction (which knows, calculates, and acts) and execution (which does not know, which waits and suffers)—this scission being constitutive of an exploitative society. We then are referred back to a concrete historical analysis of contemporary Russian society, of the economic and social nature of the bureaucracy and of the role of Stalinism.

Fleeing from this analysis and discussing rather the problems faced by the

system's politicians (whether the rulers or their opponents), the philosopher, by placing these politicians within a revolutionary context without asking whether they still were a part of it, creates an imaginary opposition between reality—which has turned back into the simple reality of exploitation and alienation—and its projection on the screen of revolution, an arbitrary projection for which he alone is responsible. One could have discussed the insoluble contradictions with which a revolutionary politics may collide, not in relation to the Moscow trials, or even to the “capitulations” of 1928 that made them inevitable, but with regard to Kronstadt, for example. One would have perceived then that they do not express simply a crisis in the Marxist dialectic, but much less and much more at the same time: a crisis, a stopping point, and a setback for the revolution itself. And certainly, this halt, like a new departure for the revolution, could not help but pose problems that would have to be examined. But at the same time as this, one could not then reduce Bukharin to Socrates, Lenin to Oedipus, and Trotsky to the Sorcerer's Apprentice, do away with questions properly belonging to the revolution by talking about the “evil spell of living with other people,”<sup>3</sup> and end up in this desert of political skepticism where, whatever might be said elsewhere, everything goes, where all projects sooner or later wither away, where every prospect for rational action ultimately is abolished.

This metaphysics also was factitious in another sense: Khrushchev's “revelations” confirm that the trials did not express political oppositions within the bureaucracy of the kind that can exist in bourgeois politics. The trials could not serve as an example, not even for a classical treatise on the conflicts between intention and result, between ends and means, within an alienated world. The ruling circle's purging of a part of the bureaucracy certainly was not the result of Stalin's madness, or of a cult of personality fallen from heaven, as Khrushchev would like to make us believe. The trials performed a social function: The terror cemented the bureaucracy together and sent a chill through the people for some period of time. They also performed a political function in that they sanctified the ruling group and the person incarnating the bureaucratic class without anyone's being able to challenge them. But at no time did the trials express a real political conflict, lived as such by the protagonists. The execution of a few prominent ex-opponents among the thousands of Stalinists sacrificed was not aimed at liquidating political differences (which had been abandoned or wiped out many long years before). It was aimed rather at furnishing both a pretext and a political mask for this self-purging of the bureaucracy, at terrorizing true opponents who might eventually come forward, by showing them the horrible fate of every opponent—even fictive ones.

Neither the “mysteries of the Russian soul” nor, more elegantly if not more seriously, the complicity between the accused and the court—the fact that on the whole the accused adhered to the theory of objective guilt and freely lent themselves to the most effective staging—provide an “explanation” of these confessions. Bukharin, it was said, bowed before history and acknowledged his guilt because he was defeated. Bukharin, Khrushchev says in fact, did not recognize anything at all; torture had led him “to a state of unconsciousness where he

los[t] his judgment and abandon[ed] his human dignity” so that one could make him say anything.

Certainly torture is not an absolute, and if people give in to it, it is due to a particular psychology and a political perspective. Khrushchev’s “explanation,” if it is superficially correct, is at the same time, as a description of material facts, incomplete and mechanistic, and thereby expresses once again, as a matter of fact, the bureaucratic mentality of the interpreter. In Moscow only those who already were ideological cadavers were tortured. As Victor Serge remarked at the time, *not a single authentic revolutionary opponent of the regime figured in the trials.*<sup>4</sup> Torture could work only against people who had been broken politically a long time before, who had capitulated, who had recanted, who had in fact completely abandoned not only every revolutionary perspective but every political attitude. Indeed, torture was effective only in a minority of cases; there were some suicides and most of those shot were executed without public sentencing. Only those about whom one was sure were brought to the trials; even among them certain ones, like I. N. Smirnov during the Trial of the Sixteen, almost made everything fail.

The “complicity” of the accused was not before the court. We must search elsewhere for the condemned’s “solidarity” with the system that was going to shoot them: It was in their capitulation to, and in their participation in, a bureaucratic ideology and mentality. The moral resilience that allows a revolutionary to resist physical pressure and torture is of a piece [*solidaire*] with everything he thinks, with everything he is. It is of a piece with his irreconcilable hatred of the system of exploitation and of the human type represented by the exploiters, their prosecutors, and their police, and with the positive humanistic perspective he thinks gives him the right to oppose them. What appears as the revolutionary’s heroism comes from the fact that certain ideas cling to his body more closely than his nails and his skin—and these ideas are nothing but the thoroughgoing criticism of exploitative society and the project of a human one. The strength of his heroism is the awareness of a radical scission with the oppressors, of the absolute opposition of two worlds.

Now, the accused in the trials—whether we are talking about those in Moscow before the war, or those in the satellite countries after it—were in fact of a piece with the system of oppression that had just been set up. The successive groups of ex-Bolshevik capitulators—whether previously they were “Left” or “Right” oppositionists or loyal to Stalin—never criticized the regime that had been established after 1923, unless they did it in superficial terms; rather, they had contributed to its establishment. Still less were they capable of opposing to it a fundamentally different social outlook. Russia remained for them a socialist country, and socialism was the power of the bureaucracy—a power they would have liked to be less brutal. Where then could they have drawn the strength to oppose it?

This is even clearer in the case of the postwar purges in the satellite countries. In what way did the Rajks, Kostovs, and Slánskýs (whatever their individual peculiarities) differ *politically*—and we give to “politics” here the Marxist meaning of a philosophy of history and a conception of man as these have entered into ev-

eryday practice—from the Rákosis and the Gottwalds? For the first group as well as for the second, it always was a matter of using working-class revolt to seize power by every means available, to establish economic planning and a totalitarian dictatorship (whether at heart they call this “socialism” and consider it as humanity’s salvation matters little, both in general and for the purposes of our discussion). If the system turns against them, what motivation do they have to go on struggling? Nothing, except personal salvation—and from that moment on, “confession” cuts short the torture and allows them to cling to the hope of mercy, the glimmerings of which appear all the brighter now that the accused knows that he has lost.

In this sense, it is true that the “confessions” implied that the accused recognized their ultimate identity with the judges—not that they recognized in the latter victorious revolutionaries, but rather that they recognized in themselves defeated bureaucrats.

Ever since the first large Moscow trials, it has been clear that the accusations were entirely trumped up. For anyone who kept trying to think, the indictments were never anything but huge accumulations of monstrous falsehoods fabricated by clumsy prosecutors of mediocre intelligence who were allowed by totalitarian censorship and the bureaucracy’s international promotional apparatus to botch their briefs, inventing at will nonexistent hotels, airplane flights that never took place, etc.<sup>5</sup>

That does not mean that there was, outside Stalinist circles, a clamor against the imposture of the trials. On the contrary. Faced with the new mystification already in the process of developing, we certainly should recall how the present rulers of Russia have as much blood on their hands as Stalin; that Khrushchev, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Molotov, and Kaganovich wrote or had it written all day long during the trials: *Shoot the mad dogs!*; that Thorez, Duclos, Togliatti, Pollitt, Gallacher,<sup>6</sup> etc., participated actively in the murders by spreading lies, by keeping silent about all the contradictions, by treating anyone who dared to have doubts as a fascist or a cop. Even though they did not want to change from the role of brilliant and infallible bosses to that of cretins swallowing for a period of twenty years all the inventions of a “madman” and a “British spy,” it remains true that, as far as they could, they themselves murdered their revolutionary opponents—Trotskyists, anarchists, POUMists,<sup>7</sup> Left Socialists—everywhere they could—in Spain, in France, in Greece, in Indochina—at an ever vaster scale as they felt themselves coming closer to power. They continue these lies and these fabrications every day. For the past four months, the French Communist party newspaper, *Humanité*, is but one long lie when it comes to the Twentieth Congress. The resolution of their Politburo is but one more lie when they pretend “not to have known anything”—they, without whose active and conscious aid a good part of Stalin’s crimes would not have been possible.

But even more should be recalled. *We should recall that Stalin’s crimes enjoyed the complicity of the whole of established society.* For while revolutionary militants, even those who favored capitulation, even those who were dishonored in 1917, were being exterminated, bourgeois and reformists alike rejoiced. In fact, only



after 1945, when the cold war drove them to look for some arguments to back up their anti-Russian propaganda and when all revolutionary movement seemed impossible to them, were they no longer afraid to reinforce working-class opposition to Stalinism. Only when the victims of the trials began to be taken from the rank and file of the Stalinist bureaucracy did they begin to “denounce” the trials. Until then, almost every one of them were accomplices: the SFIO,<sup>8</sup> whose *Le Populaire* kept quiet since 1934 about the GPU’s crimes (first, the Stalin-Laval rapprochement and later the Popular Front necessitated it!); the Spanish Socialists, who gave a free hand to this very same Antonov-Ovseyenko whose unjust execution by Stalin Khrushchev today cries over—how unjust indeed, since Ovseyenko was, along with Marty, the organizer of the counterrevolutionary repression in Republican Spain; the Norwegian Socialists (in power in 1935-36), whose minister of “justice,” Trygve Lie, muzzled Trotsky for three months in 1936, right in the middle of the Trial of the Sixteen, isolating him and preventing him from defending himself against machinations aimed primarily at him; the French League of the Rights of Man, whose president, Victor Basch, found the proceedings of the Moscow trials perfectly normal; the “objective” journalists, like Mr. Duranty, and “socialist” jurists, like Mr. Pitt, counselor to His Majesty, who, having been invited to Moscow during the trials, found the proceedings impeccable and the verdicts justified, etc.

All the intellectuals “on the Left” were accomplices too, with very rare exceptions—and we are not talking here about avowed Stalinists, but the whole vast group of close and distant “sympathizers”; the saints and the “realists,” the Romain Rollands and the Jean Cassous,<sup>9</sup> who covered up this whole wretched operation with their moral authority, and all the others whom it would be tiresome to enumerate.

They “didn’t know” either? What a pitiful excuse! Once one has read the official reports, just the slightest trace of intelligence is enough to realize that this *could not have been true*; just the slightest trace of objectivity is enough to lend half an ear to the principal accused, Trotsky, and to find in his statements to the press, his articles, his books, the overwhelming and irrefutable proofs of this imposture. No, it was not out of ignorance. For some, self-interest played a part, either directly or indirectly, as always. This is the case of least interest to us.

For the others, it was a matter of “sacrificing one’s conscience,” of “effectiveness,” of “realism”—of a resumption of the old conservative morality, which, camouflaged under the tattered clothes of Marxism, allowed intellectuals “on the Left” to mystify themselves and endow their alienation with an ideological value. They devote themselves to the worship of the “hard reality of history” (which in fact is prostration before brute force), to the sublimation of the “incarnation”<sup>10</sup> (which in fact is an opportunistic attitude toward established power)—feeling all the more morally comfortable as this power presents itself as “revolutionary.” They have said, they are saying, and they will say again and again that the truth would injure the USSR’s cause—refusing to ask themselves up to what point a *true* cause can be defended by deceit, and confusing, in stupid sophisms, the deception of a revolutionary persecuted by the police and the deception of a police made up of persecutors pretending to be revolutionaries. The

only results that count, they said, are those that reinforce socialism. But Khrushchev now says that the trials “weakened” Russia “considerably.” Therefore, according to the results of their actions, all those who provided Stalin with ideological cover and moral security, who, instead of laying down a barrage of public opinion against him, let him feel that he could do anything and thus made it objectively possible for him to shoot one, then ten, then a hundred, then a thousand—all those people “objectively” contributed to the weakening of Russia; they therefore should be shot, according to their own standards. Wonderful paradoxes from this “morality of results”! These people pushed the accused into the grave because opposition to the regime “objectively” transformed them into Gestapo agents. By doing this, however, they themselves were “objectively” the agents of the British police and of the “spy” Beria; and they can shift the blame away from themselves today only by placing it on their intentions.

Are we naive, is our indignation just a case of bad manners? Is it not indecorous to mention the victims by name before their executioners and impolite to insist upon the errors of others? Is it not normal for corpses to be found under the ground and murderers in power, for people to slip out of any difficulty by saying, “Excuse me, but there was a mistake,” and for court poets to sing Nero’s praises after Caligula’s? The cynicism of Stalinist rulers and intellectuals, if it is greater than that of others, is it at bottom any different? Do not Nazi functionaries stroll tranquilly around Bonn, are they not day after day regaining their former positions of power? Is not Mollet president of the Council, is he not continuing the war in Algeria after having been elected on a promise to end it? Is this not what happens in society these days and more or less throughout the history of exploiting societies?

Yes, of course. But it is not a question of indignation. Our purpose is to show once again, with the example of the trials, that the “communist” bureaucracy is an integral part of this society, that its methods and its attitude are the age-old methods and behavior of oppressors, that it fights against an outmoded system of exploitation only to put in its place another, more modern and sometimes more horrible one, that its politics, like all others, expresses the same radical gulf between pretensions and reality, speeches and facts.

Our purpose is also to show that from this angle, which is the only important one, nothing fundamentally has changed with “de-Stalinization.” It is to struggle against the new mystification now being cooked up. For those same Stalinists who today go the furthest in acknowledging the “mistakes” of the past—we may ask how many really make such acknowledgments—do so in appearance only to be able *at bottom* to continue to mystify others and to mystify themselves. What, indeed, do we see happening? We see that almost everybody, after having made some grudging pronouncements and looking around for some excuses, is in a hurry to conjure away both what has happened and its meaning. They want to return quickly to the business at hand. Among some we see “repentance,” the public display of their tortured souls—which no one is asking for, since no one is interested in it—instead of an analysis, an essay, an effort to see clearly into what has happened and into their own actions. The proletarian revolution does

not punish or wreak vengeance, it tries to construct the future consciously; it has no need of repentance, but rather a lucid analysis of history. The disoriented intellectuals who, after having found a substitute for Catholicism in Stalinism, today see themselves suspended in the void, are less capable than ever of pursuing such an analysis. Their “repentance” shows that they remain forever attached to the bourgeois-bureaucratic universe at the very moment when they think they have detached themselves from it the most; its political function is to provide a moral cover for the continued mystification of the CP. The sacrifice of conscience—one’s own and especially that of others—continues. It matters little if Claude Roy<sup>11</sup> lives it henceforth as a heartrending experience rather than as a sign of virility.

It will be said, however, that everyone is demanding such an “analysis.” Indeed, Thorez and Togliatti ask Khrushchev for an analysis! Why don’t they begin it themselves? But Khrushchev is asking for an analysis too! From whom? Is it worth insisting upon? If the CP “demands an analysis,” it is only a means for it to bury the question, to tranquilize the most troubled militants and to postpone discussion indefinitely. The manner in which it demands this analysis and the subject on which it would like such an analysis to focus—“to determine the entire set of circumstances in which Stalin was able to exercise personal power”—show that this is all just camouflage. Everything holds together in a social system. As we have tried to show elsewhere in this issue,<sup>a</sup> for a Marxist, Khrushchev’s reports (the public as well as the secret one) mean that the idea that “the USSR is a socialist country” has exploded from within. Neither Khrushchev (i.e., the Russian bureaucracy) nor Thorez (i.e., the bureaucracy of the French Communist party) can provide an analysis of “the entire set of circumstances” without disavowing from one end to the other both themselves and the system they represent. Let us set a date and wager that, with few exceptions, Stalinist intellectuals eventually will be content with “analyses” differing little from those in which the “spy Beria” plays the leading role.

### Notes

1. Save for Slánský, whom Prague persists in considering—alone among his codefendants who now are “rehabilitated”—an agent of the Hitlerite Tito, who, it now turns out, no longer is Hitlerian but an honest Communist ruler calumniated by the English spy Beria, at least if you believe Khrushchev, of whom it still is not known for whose payroll he works. The contempt for humanity that the incoherence and cynicism of these Stalinist lies express has never been equaled in history, not even by the heads of nazism.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror* (1969; reprinted, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980). [T/E: The book was originally published in French in 1947.]

3. T/E: This phrase (“le maléfice de la vie à plusieurs”) also comes from Merleau-Ponty.

4. Victor Serge, *Russia Twenty Years After*, trans. Max Shachtman (New York: Hillman-Curl, 1937), p. 225.

5. The defendant Goltzman “confessed” to having met Trotsky in Copenhagen in 1932 at the Bristol Hotel—which had been destroyed by a fire in 1917. Piatakov “confessed” to having gone to Norway by plane on December 12 or 13, 1935, and to having landed in Oslo. When the Norwegian press stated immediately that no foreign plane had arrived in Oslo in December 1935, Vyshinsky got Piatakov to say in court two days later that he had landed “near” Oslo, and produced a communiqué from the USSR’s commercial agent in Norway, stating that foreign airplanes were landing all year

long at the Kjeller airport “near Oslo.” Two days later, the director of the Kjeller airport declared that no foreign airplanes had landed there between September 19, 1935, and May 10, 1936. This fact, as well as the testimony that Trotsky could by no means have met Piatakov in December 1935, was brought to the attention of the Moscow “court” before the closure of testimony by a telegram from Konrad Knudsen, a Norwegian Socialist member of Parliament and Trotsky’s host during his stay in Norway. Naturally, the “court” payed no heed to this deposition from a witness who had not been cooked up by the GPU, and the only result was that Piatakov was condemned and shot more quickly. On all of this, and a host of other similar cases, see Trotsky’s *Les Crimes de Staline* (1937). [T/E: Only the preface of this book exists in English: Trotsky, *Writings, 1936-37* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978), pp. 353-58.]

6. T/E: Maurice Thorez (1900-64) was secretary-general of the French Communist party at this time. Jacques Duclos (1896-1975) was the head of the Party’s parliamentary group. Togliatti was head of the Italian CP. Harry Pollitt (1890-1960) was secretary-general of the British CP at this time. William Gallacher (1881-1965) also was a British CP leader.

7. T/E: POUM refers to the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Worker Party of Marxist Unification), an anti-Stalinist party on the Republican side in the early stages of the Spanish Civil War.

8. T/E: The SFIO was the Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière, the forerunner of today’s French Socialist party.

9. T/E: Romain Rolland (1866-1944) was a French Nobel prize-winning author who tried to “reconcile the thought of India (Gandhi) with that of Moscow.” In rallying to the defense of communism in 1927, he expressed his desire to retain an “independent mind.” Jean Cassou (1897-1983) was a poet and writer usually described as a “humanist.” He took political positions against fascism and for the Republican government of his native Spain, and supported Tito after his break with Stalin.

10. T/E: This is a reference to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of “embodiment” [*incarnation*].

11. T/E: Claude Roy (b. 1915) is another “humanist” poet and novelist.

a) See the preceding chapter, “Khrushchev and the Decomposition of Bureaucratic Ideology,” and Claude Lefort’s article, cited in note 4 there.

## 6

# The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy

The movement of the Eastern European proletariat against the bureaucracy and its system of exploitation and oppression that is fraudulently presented as socialist is now bursting forth into broad daylight. For many long years it remained concealed in factories, expressing itself only through the workers' continuously renewed refusal to cooperate with their exploiters. It overflowed onto the streets of East Berlin in June 1953. It then took up arms in June 1956 at Poznan. It made the Russian masters tremble with rage and fear and eventually forced them to back down in October 1956 in Poland. It now has mounted an assault on the heavens themselves for the past seven weeks in Hungary where it is achieving unbelievable results: In the space of a few short days it has pulverized the ruling class, its State, its party, and its ideology as no class, State, party, or ideology has been pulverized before; it struggles with its bare hands against the tanks and machine guns of the most powerful army the world has ever seen; on the day after its military "defeat," it picks up still more strength, clarity, awareness, and organization than ever before.

The Hungarian Revolution is the most advanced position in this combat. This means merely that it offers the clearest and the highest expression of the tendencies and goals of workers in our epoch. Its significance is utterly universal. Its underlying causes can be found in all the countries dominated by the so-called communist bureaucracy—and in Western capitalist countries as well. Its lessons hold true for Russian, Czech, and Yugoslavian workers—just as tomorrow they will hold true for Chinese workers. They hold equally well for French, British, and American workers. In the Csepel factories in Budapest as well as in the Renault factories in Paris, workers suffer, in nearly the same forms and

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nearly to the same degree, the same exploitation, the same oppression. They are cheated out of the product of their labor, they are expropriated from the direction of their own activity, they are subjected to the domination of a stratum of despotic rulers decked out in “democratic” or “socialist” garb. Here as there and whatever its forms, the workers’ struggle is therefore ultimately the same. Here as there, the workers aim and can only aim at the same goals: to abolish exploitation, to manage their own work, to create a new organization of society. Hungarian workers have pushed this struggle to its ultimate form. They have taken arms, they have set up councils, they have advanced the essential elements of a socialist program: limitation of hierarchy, abolition of work norms, workers’ management in the factories, a leading role for the workers’ councils in social life. Forced to cease armed combat in the face of the brutal intervention of Russian tanks, they have not for all that abandoned their struggle. For five weeks, their general strike, their refusal to cooperate with Kádár, the incredible courage they display in support of their demands, in defiance of Khrushchev’s tanks and machine guns and despite hunger, cold, and deportations, show to the stunned world the impotence of the oppressors and the inanity of their crimes before the immense force of a consciously aware proletariat. Even if it is temporarily vanquished, the Hungarian Revolution will have been a profound defeat for the exploiters. And its repercussions, which are only beginning to be felt, will have transformed the world in this second half of the twentieth century.

For the first time, a modern totalitarian regime has been smashed by a workers’ uprising. For ten years this regime had done everything it could to exterminate all opposition; it had surrounded the country with a ring of police agents and informers; it claimed to have control over all of people’s activities and even their souls. Suddenly, the scientifically organized system of totalitarian oppression flew to pieces before the determination and heroism of the practically unarmed Hungarian population. After six days of desperate struggle, the Russian divisions themselves had to recognize their defeat and cease firing on Sunday, October 28. The crushing of the armed resistance after November 4 by the second Russian intervention, which required a week-long battle and twenty tank divisions, does not lessen the accuracy of this statement: It reinforces it. No mere “police operation” could stamp out the Hungarian insurrection. Several army corps units had to engage in regular military operations for six days in order to defeat the civil population of a country of ten million inhabitants. And, on the political plane, the “victory” of Russian imperialism ended in an unprecedented defeat. To dominate a country is not the same as dominating its ruins, nor is it to bring on themselves forever the inexpiable hatred of the whole population with the exception of a handful of traitors and sellouts.

For the first time, the proletariat has fought head-on with the bureaucratic regime that dares to call itself “working-class” and that, in reality, represents the latest and most perfected form of an exploitative and oppressive system of rule. Almost the entire population of a country is rising up and battling an allegedly “popular” regime. Through their struggle, the Hungarian workers have torn the “communist” mask from the bureaucracy and made it appear to the eyes of

humanity in its hideous nakedness: an exploiting stratum full of hatred and fear of the workers, now in a state of utter political and moral decomposition, incapable of relying upon anything but Russian tanks to ensure its domination and ready to massacre “its” population, to reduce “its” country to ruins with a foreign army in order to maintain itself in power.

Not through theoretical discussions but by the shots fired by armed insurrectionists, the Hungarian Revolution demolishes the most gigantic fraud in history: the presentation of the bureaucratic system of rule as “socialist”—a fraud in which bourgeois and Stalinists, intellectuals of the “Right” and of the “Left” had collaborated because in the end they all profited by it. The usurpation of Marxism, of socialism, and of the flag of the proletarian revolution by the stratum of totalitarian exploiters who predominate in Russia and elsewhere appears here and now as an intolerable insult in the eyes of large masses of workers. It is becoming clear even to the least conscious of people that, once in power, Stalinists represent the working class as much as the slave driver represents the galley slave.

The Polish crisis and the Hungarian Revolution bring into broad daylight the terrible crisis of the bureaucratic system of rule and then intensify it a hundred-fold. They force the bureaucracy to open its account books and its secret police archives, if only partway. What emerges is not simply the image of the most inhuman form of exploitation and oppression, but also the image of unbelievable chaos throughout bureaucratic society, the terrifying anarchy of the supposedly “planned” economy and the bureaucracy’s total inability to manage its own economy, its own system. Through their action the Polish and Hungarian workers likewise have shown the extreme fragility of this regime. The Russian “bloc” is no less made up of bits and pieces than the American “bloc”; the one, like the other, is incapable of organizing its domination over its satellites. The bureaucratic class is no more securely woven into the fabric of society than the bourgeois class; a few days of insurrection suffice to make its system of rule, its State apparatus, its party vanish.

The Hungarian Revolution has reduced “democratization” and “de-Stalinization” to nothing. It has shown that for the bureaucracy, as for every other exploiting class, it never could have been a question of concessions on essential questions. The true face of “democratization,” the ruins of Budapest, and the infamous lies of Radio Moscow show this to the workers of the world. Moreover, the Hungarian Revolution has shown that the bureaucracy, just like the bourgeoisie, finds itself incapable of having any coherent policy whatsoever, whether “democratic” or not. It is logical for an exploiting class to kill people for a policy. But it is clear that purely and simply massacring people is not, in itself, a policy. Surely it expresses not only the absence of policy but one’s inability to have one. Just as French imperialism, with its back against the wall, is at one and the same time incapable of dominating North Africa by force and of abandoning it entirely, so the Russian bureaucracy is at one and the same time incapable of pulling out of Hungary and of remaining there. Obligated to put an end to “democratization,” which was becoming transformed into revolution, incapable of reverting to the now unenforceable Stalinist system, it is thereby reduced

to the spasmodic use of violence, which resolves nothing and immediately is turned back against it. Khrushchev, hysterical blunderer and drunken chatterer that he is, is the worthy incarnation in the present era of the bureaucracy just as much as Stalin, perfidious, taciturn, narrow-minded and cruel, was for the preceding era.

Facing down this exploitative, corrupt, and rotten bureaucracy, which fear drives to the assassination of a whole people, stands the human figure of the Hungarian proletariat. Only ten years was needed for it to gain experience of the new system of exploitation and to draw from this experience its own conclusions. Totalitarian terror and poverty have neither broken it nor demoralized it; they have, on the contrary, clarified its awareness and strengthened its determination. Without any preliminary organization, without anyone having to point out to them anything whatsoever, the Hungarian workers organized themselves into councils from the first days of the insurrection. Only a foreign army prevented them and prevents them still from seizing power. And while a handful of traitors try unsuccessfully to reconstitute a State apparatus, the councils are the sole form of social organization that still exists. Their strength is such that they were able to achieve this miracle that never before has been seen: a several-week-long general strike *after* the military defeat of an insurrection. Their program equals and even surpasses that of every proletarian revolution up to this day: limitation of hierarchy, workers' management of the factories, abolition of work norms. They put forward political demands, which show that they are the sole political force in this society in ruins, and they insist upon having a leading political role. It is they who demand the retreat of the Russian troops, the right to publish their own newspapers, the constitution of workers' councils in all sectors of national life, and recognition by the government of their representative and political functions.

Journalists and intellectuals of the Right and the Left will see in all this a host of things: the incompetence of certain rulers, the struggle of various tendencies within the bureaucracy, chance, a trend toward "national socialism," a crisis peculiar to the bureaucratic system of rule, new possibilities for reformism. They will see in it everything they want to see in it—except the basic thing, the only thing that matters: the working class's struggle against exploitation, the working class's struggle for a new form of social organization. They will not see that behind these events in Eastern Europe, as well as behind all of history over the past century, there is a factor that shapes modern society and gives to it its characteristic traits: the development of the proletariat and its struggle for a classless society.

Once we get to the bottom of things, we see that there is no crisis peculiar to the bureaucracy and its system of rule, bureaucratic capitalism. Of course, the more recent and less homogeneous bureaucracy of the satellite countries is not as solid as the Russian bureaucracy. The Twentieth Congress, however, is there to bear witness that the latter is going through the same crisis within its own country, though with a different timing. And this crisis itself renders vain all the efforts the ruling classes in the West have undertaken to stabilize their system of rule and to manage their society. This is the cause of French capitalism's inabil-



ity to rationalize the management of the country or to settle its relations with its former colonies. It is also the cause of English and American capitalism's inability to discipline their workers and to dominate their satellites. Bureaucratic capitalism in Russia and in Eastern Europe simply applies to the whole of the economy and of society the methods that private capitalism has created for and applied to the management of each individual factory. These methods, which are based on the domination of a stratum of managers over the mass of producers, are less and less capable of permitting even a moderately rational and harmonious functioning of social life. In the East as in the West, regimes have to cope with the problem dominating our epoch: From now on, no particular class exists on the scale needed to run society. Life in the modern world, which is made up of the intertwined and constantly changing activities of hundreds of millions of conscious producers, escapes the grasp of every ruling stratum that raises itself above society. Either this world will plunge deeper and deeper into chaos or it will be reorganized from top to bottom by the producing masses, thus making a *tabula rasa* of all established institutions and instaurating new ones, which will permit the free deployment of the creative capacities of millions of individuals who alone can deal with the problems created by life in modern societies. This reorganization cannot begin in any other way than by workers' management of production, the total and direct power of the producers, organized in their councils, over the economy and over all of social life.

For years we have worked unceasingly to show—as other revolutionary groups have done in other countries—that in no way was bureaucratic capitalism resolving the contradictions of contemporary society; that, just as much as the bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy itself was digging its own grave; that the proletarians of the countries dominated by this bureaucracy could neither be mystified by an imaginary “socialism” nor reduced to the state of impotent slaves; that, on the contrary, having experienced the most perfected, the most concentrated form of capitalism and exploitation, they were becoming ripe for a revolution surpassing in its clarity and its determination all previous revolutions.

Today the proletariat of Eastern Europe is in the vanguard of the world revolution.

We have worked unceasingly to show that the clear, definitive, and irrefutable conclusion to be drawn from the experience of the Russian Revolution was that a party separate and distinct from the working class could not be the instrument for the dictatorship of the proletariat, that the latter was the power of the masses' soviet organs; but also and especially that the dictatorship of the proletariat had no meaning if it was not straightaway and at the same time workers' management of production.

Today, the Hungarian working class spontaneously makes its program the adoption of *workers' management* and demands that the *leading role in all domains of national life be granted to the workers' councils*.

The Hungarian Revolution is bringing these ideas to the common awareness of workers in all countries.

Through this revolution, through its heroic example—whatever may be its subsequent fate—it overturns existing political classifications, it creates a new

line of demarcation both within the workers' movement as well as within society at large. It creates a new historical era. A host of problems are emptied of their content. A host of debates become purely and simply pointless. The time for subtleties and subterfuges has passed. For years to come, *all questions that count* can be summed up as follows: Are you for or against the action and the program of the Hungarian workers? Are you for or against the constitution of workers' councils in all sectors of national life and workers' management of production?

### The Bureaucratic Economy and the Exploitation of the Proletariat

#### *Bureaucratic "Planning"*

Until now Stalinist propaganda—aided by the subtle “objective” advocates of the bureaucracy, of which Charles Bettelheim is the typical representative in France—had succeeded in persuading the public that “planning,” as it is practiced in Russia and in its satellite countries, represented a mode of directing the economy that was at once new and better, as well as infinitely more effective than the blind guidance of the economy achieved by the capitalist market.

This is just a myth. Bureaucratic planning is nothing but the extension to the economy as a whole of the methods created and applied by capitalism in the “rational” direction of large production units. If we consider the most profound feature of the economy, the concrete situation in which people are placed, we see that bureaucratic planning is the most highly perfected realization of the spirit of capitalism; it pushes to the limit its most significant tendencies. Just as in the management of a large capitalist production unit, this type of planning is carried out by a separate stratum of managers made up of bureaucrats from the economy, the State, and the party. Its essence, like that of capitalist production, lies in an effort to reduce the direct producers to the role of pure and simple executants of received orders, orders formulated by a particular stratum that pursues its own interests. This stratum cannot run things well, just as the management apparatus at Renault or Ford factories cannot run things well. The myth of capitalism's productive efficiency at the level of the individual factory, a myth shared by bourgeois and Stalinist ideologues alike, cannot stand up to the most elementary examination of the facts, and any industrial worker<sup>1</sup> could draw up a devastating indictment against capitalist “rationalization” *judged on its own terms*.

First of all, the managerial bureaucracy does not *know* what it is supposed to be managing. The reality of production escapes it, for this reality is nothing but the activity of the producers, and the producers do not inform the managers, whether they are private capitalists or bureaucrats, about what really is taking place. Quite often they organize themselves in such a way that the managers won't be informed (in order to avoid increased exploitation, because they feel antagonistic, or quite simply because they have no interest: It isn't *their* business).

In the second place, the way in which production is organized is set up entirely against the workers. They always are being asked, one way or another, to do more work without getting paid for it. Management's orders, therefore, inevitably meet with fierce resistance on the part of those who have to carry them out. In this way, the managerial apparatus, whether it is in France or in Poland, in America or in Russia, spends most of its time not in organizing *production* but in organizing *constraints*, either direct or indirect ones.

In the third place, as much if not more than that of a private capitalist factory, the bureaucracy's managerial apparatus is rent by internal conflicts. The various professional "categories" of bureaucrats, upon whom are superimposed "political" coteries and even clans and cliques properly speaking, escape from one another's clutches, deceive each other, reciprocally disclaim responsibilities, and so on. And struggles among such clans and cliques are a basic sociological given in a regime organized along the lines of a "civil service."

All this makes bureaucratic "planning" a mishmash of rationality and absurdity with about the same degree of wastefulness as that of the traditional capitalist economy. For the wastefulness that arises in every capitalist factory due to the radical scission between the class of directors and the class of executants and to an irreconcilable opposition of the interests and attitudes of these two classes exists just as much in the bureaucratically run factory. And the extension of this mode of control to the economy as a whole, where problems are much more difficult to resolve since they are much more complex, ensures that the "planned" economy will exhibit the same degree of anarchy as can be observed in the private capitalist economy, though under different forms.

*Bureaucratic planning is as chaotic as the capitalist market is.*

Of course, the Stalinists and their apologists have been talking for some time now about certain "errors" in the planning process. It is not a question of "errors"; it is a question of a certain type of anarchy that is organically inherent in bureaucratic-type planning. It is almost as if they were trying to make us believe that somewhere in the planning offices a calculator made an error in multiplication. In reality, it is a matter of a fundamental social and historical phenomenon: The bureaucracy is just as incapable of rationally directing the economy as private capitalism is incapable of doing so.

Until now, it has been extremely difficult to provide precise empirical proof for this statement due to the fact that the bureaucracy was systematically hiding economic data about its system. Of late, it has begun to publish some statistics.

Let us note in passing that as a matter of fact this change in attitude expresses precisely this crisis we have been talking about; Khrushchev and other speakers at the Russian Party's Twentieth Congress have acknowledged in veiled terms that the bureaucracy's mendacity has turned against it, since it was becoming impossible for the bureaucracy to know even the official truth about its own economy. Of course, the bureaucracy can cure one of its ills only by creating for itself another: The publication of statistics, even cooked ones, cannot fail to provoke discussion and ferment in intellectual circles, which are not all, to say the least, wholly owned by the regime.

At the level of the economy as a whole, the wastefulness of bureaucratic planning is revealed first by the lack of commensurability, of a rational connection on the technical level, between the development of the various sectors of production. Workers are exploited in order to build new factories. But these factories do not function at all, or they function well below their productive capacity—because the sectors that ought to provide them with raw materials or utilize their products have not been developed accordingly. Thus, according to the accompanying official figures,<sup>2</sup> production as envisaged in the Czechoslovakian plan for 1956 ought to remain far below the productive capacity available in the country's principal sectors.

| <i>(in millions of tons)</i>  | A    | B    |
|-------------------------------|------|------|
| Coal                          | 23.4 | 28.9 |
| Brown coal                    | 40.6 | 63.5 |
| Iron ore                      | 2.95 | 6.4  |
| Rolled products               | 3.21 | 4.75 |
| Cement                        | 3.16 | 5.12 |
| <i>(in thousands of tons)</i> |      |      |
| Sulfuric acid                 | 427  | 484  |
| Nitrogenous fertilizers       | 69   | 94   |
| Phosphorous fertilizers       | 106  | 203  |

Note: A = plan for 1956; B = productive capacity

*The Czechoslovakian workers have starved for ten years in order to build factories that operate at half capacity!* What happens any differently under private capitalism? In fact, percentages of utilization of available capacity as low as those found here (60, 50, and even 40 percent) do not appear in the private capitalist economy except in years of very severe depression.

This is not a situation peculiar to Czechoslovakia. In Hungary, "Capacity . . . is not fully utilized," the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) said in August, in the engineering industries as well as in *the textile and food-processing industries*, and this while the population is underfed to a well-known degree! In Russia, "The Directives of the Five-Year Plan . . . reveal that sizable capacity reserves exist in the chemical, engineering and food-processing industries" (ECE, *Economic Bulletin*, p. 26). As for Poland, the description given by Oskar Lange, official government economist, is absolutely catastrophic.

Along with these revolutionary social and economic changes [he is talking about the creation of heavy industry and the "nationalization" of the means of production—Au.], however, serious disproportions have arisen which hinder further development of the national economy. These disproportions are generally known: disproportion between the development of agriculture and industry; disproportion between the productive capacity of industry and its raw material supplies; disproportion between the quantitative increase of production and the quality of products as well as production costs;

and disproportion between investment and production programmes, on the one hand, and on the other the obsolete techniques which still prevail in many of our enterprises.

These disproportions are reflected in the great difficulties of our foreign trade, in the shortage of raw materials which leads to interruptions in production and to incomplete utilization of existing industrial capacity, in the wastage of equipment and raw materials and in the deficient and irregular supply of goods and services to the population.<sup>3</sup>

We must have a full understanding of what these data signify. The bureaucracy masks the failure of planning first of all by lying flat out—by publishing false data; no one was able, till now (and in most cases, no one yet is able), to verify whether “the plan was carried out 101 percent.” Yet there is even more. The plan can be carried out 101 percent or 99 percent in relation to its own objectives. *But what is the relation of these objectives to the economy’s real potentialities?* It is on this feature of the Eastern European economy—which no longer is concerned with the ratio of one set of figures on paper to another set of figures on paper—that the data furnished earlier cast their harsh light. If the 1956 Czechoslovak Phosphorous Fertilizer Production Plan is achieved at 100 percent, this means that 50 percent of this sector’s productive capacity (see the figures in the preceding table) has been wasted—while agriculture has a pressing need for fertilizer.

In the ECE study previously cited (pp. 26-29), we can find several other examples of underutilization of productive capacity—that is to say, idled machinery. Lange says of Poland that “the present limited utilization [of the ‘existing productive capacity of industry’—Au.] is considered wasteful by the working class and by society as a whole” (p. 149). But what is astonishing to discover is that the idled machinery goes along hand in hand with idled people. Lange states that in Poland, “some serious signs of unemployment are becoming apparent.” The ECE is more explicit. In Poland, Hungary, and Romania, it says, the “manufacturing industry can in general recruit as many workers as it needs.” In Poland, “300,000 persons, or 4½ per cent of those employed in the socialist sector, were without work in June, and both in Poland and in Hungary the absorption of school leavers into the labor force is proving slower than usual. In Budapest, for example, one-third of the 14,000 to 15,000 young persons in the 14- to 15-year age-group did not at once find work, and difficulties are expected with employment of those of the 16- to 18-year age-group who so far have had only seasonal employment on the land” (p. 26).

*Working-Class Resistance:  
Ultimate Cause of the Failure of the “Plan”*

In almost all the bureaucratic countries—Russia, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, even Poland—one of the gravest expressions of this disproportionality till now has been the utterly inadequate levels of development of

energy production. In some cases, this was the result of “poor planning”: In Russia, for example, oil-refinery output during the first half-year of 1956 had not attained the levels set by the plan on account of transportation difficulties and lack of storage space. This means that after thirty years of practice with “planning,” the Russian bureaucracy still is capable of building refineries without having resolved at the same time the problems of transporting oil to these refineries and of storing it! Who does not see that such “mistakes” are not accidental, but rather are the intrinsic result of the bureaucratic mode of planning?

The fundamental cause of this energy shortage, however, lies in the crisis of coal production. This crisis expresses the same conflict between miners and production managers that prevails equally in France, in England, or in Germany, and which also prevents these countries from developing their production of coal despite their overriding need to do so. Work conditions in the mines of Eastern Europe are the same as those in Western capitalist countries so that, although the wages paid to miners are higher than those of other branches of industry, the workers leave the mines as soon as they can, just like in Western countries. In Russia, the Donets coal mines did not reach their plan targets in the first half-year of 1956 on account of a manpower shortage. In Czechoslovakia, miner absenteeism was 9 percent in 1937 (i.e., a miner did not report to his shift nine days out of every hundred); it was 18 percent in the first half of 1956. “The manpower situation in the Czechoslovak coal-mines is in fact regarded as so serious that the Government has recently imposed a formal ban on movement of workers out of the industry—a step [that is all] the more striking at a time when in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries the trend is toward a greater freedom of choice of employment” (ECE, p. 25).

In Poland, the largest coal producer among the satellite countries and one of the main producers in Europe, where production is hardly growing at all (+3 percent from 1954 to 1955, +2 percent between the first six months of 1955 and the first six months of 1956), the coal-export program had to be reduced from 24.3 million tons in 1955 to 21 million in 1956. With Polish coal exports directed mainly toward other satellite countries, the ECE estimates that “the repercussions of this cut on other Eastern European countries will inevitably be serious” (p. 27). According to the ECE, the Polish coal-mining crisis results, in particular, from manpower shortages—and we will come back to the causes of this shortage. But it results also from lowered yield. Gomulka, in a section of his speech before the Polish Party’s Central Committee,<sup>4</sup> states that the daily yield of an underground crew in the Polish mines has shrunk 7.7 percent between 1949 and 1955 (in all the capitalist countries, yield increased during this period). From the same section of this speech we find out that, using good old capitalist methods, the main part of the increase in Polish coal production comes from miners’ working overtime.

Absenteeism, desertion from the mines, drops in yield hitherto unknown in the annals of modern industry—what does all this mean except the exploited miners’ bitter refusal to cooperate in the production process?

And what is the bureaucracy’s response to this situation? Gomulka describes it

in the following terms: "We have set up Sunday labor as a rule, which can only ruin the miner's health and strength and make it impossible to maintain mining equipment adequately. We have imposed on many of our miners military or prison labor."

How can the bureaucracy not see that this response, this "solution" given to the problem created by the overexploited miners' refusal to accept its system, only worsens tenfold the crisis that existed at the start? It is because it shares the outlook and mentality of all exploiting classes: The worker has to be made to work. *And it is right.* For under its system, as in every system based upon exploitation, there is only one method, one logic: the logic by which the managers put pressure on the producer—either direct physical pressure or indirect economic pressure.

We see in these examples both what the bureaucracy's "planning" amounts to and what the deepest roots of its failure are. Its own system—lying, terror, lack of supervision, systematically inflated results, fear of seeming to "criticize" higher-ups by pointing out that their directives cannot be achieved—inevitably condemns the bureaucracy to poor planning, to planning in an inherently erroneous fashion. But there is much more. The bureaucracy takes it for granted that the workers will produce what they are told to produce, according to norms set from above (which are constantly accelerated). The bureaucracy decides on paper that the miners will produce so many percentage points more (its representatives and its slave drivers in the mines are charged with the task of forcing the miner to do so), and somehow or other, on this hypothesis, it constructs its "plan": Coal will go to such and such foundries or steelworks, which will produce so much steel, which will be used by rolling mills to manufacture so much sheet metal, etc. But the miners are leaving the mines, and those who stay on are putting out less and less. Coal is not being produced, and the entire plan never gets off the ground.

As a whole, the plan allows of course for a certain degree of elasticity: Several sectors have flexible production schedules with wide margins built in, substitutes can be used, stocks can be depleted or added to, etc. Nevertheless, it is difficult for the bureaucracy to make intelligent use of this flexibility for the same reasons that made intelligent planning possible. But in any case, when workers' resistance to production in basic sectors is added to already inherently poor planning, no amount of elasticity in the world can reabsorb the resulting perturbations. Disturbances spread in a cumulative fashion from sector to sector, and from then on there is nothing surprising about the entire productive apparatus functioning at only 70, 60, or 50 percent of its capacity.

### *The Crisis in Productivity*

"Nationalization" and "planning" have changed nothing about the worker's real situation in the production process. The worker has remained a simple executant who is not simply denied all initiative by the bureaucratic methods of directing production but is transformed by these methods into a pure and simple appendage of the machinery. "Military or prison labor," Gomulka says when

speaking of Polish miners. But according to Lange, this situation exists throughout all of Polish industry, “We ran the economy by methods which are characteristic of a ‘war economy,’ i.e., by moral and political appeals, by laws, decrees and administrative regulations—in other words, by methods involving various kinds of extra-economic compulsion rather than economic incentives.”

Whence results the workers’ resistance to production and to the execution of the economic plans—which rightly are resented as exploitation pure and simple. This resistance has repercussions on economic productivity in several ways, and culminates in a terrible crisis of disorganization.

1. Resistance to exploitation expresses itself in a drop in *productivity as well as in exertion on the workers’ part* (in the simplest meaning of the word “exertion” [*effort*]); here, for example, is the basic cause of the drop in mining yield noted by Gomulka.

2. At the same time it is expressed in the disappearance of the *minimum* collective and spontaneous *management and organization* of work that the workers normally and of necessity put out. No modern factory could function for twenty-four hours without this spontaneous organization of work that groups of workers, independent of the official business management, carry out by filling in the gaps of official production directives, by preparing for the unforeseen and for regular breakdowns of equipment, by compensating for management’s mistakes, etc.

Under “normal” conditions of exploitation, workers are torn between the need to organize themselves in this way in order to carry out their work—otherwise there are repercussions for them—and their natural desire to do their work, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the awareness that by doing so they only are serving the boss’s interests. Added to these conflicting concerns are the continual efforts of the factory’s management apparatus to “direct” all aspects of the workers’ activity, which often results only in preventing them from organizing themselves.

It was left to bureaucratic “socialism” to achieve what capitalism never could do: to kill the workers’ creativity completely, to abolish almost entirely their spontaneous tendency to organize those aspects of their activity that no one but they could ever organize. Here is what Lange says about it:

For some years now we have witnessed increasing indifference as regards attitude towards work both in the administration and in the distribution of goods and supply of services. This indifference paralyzes our daily life. Lately, it has also begun to penetrate the working class which, being the socially and politically most conscious part of our society, offered the greatest resistance to this attitude. . . . The nihilistic attitude of a great part of the workers is a result both of their bad living conditions and of their lack of confidence that an economic policy which demands such great sacrifices from them is really appropriate and justified.<sup>5</sup>

3. Resistance to exploitation leads to a *qualitative* drop in productivity.

The psychological attitude due to these objective material difficulties



is accelerating the process of dislocation in the national economy. In industry, production of substandard or unusable goods (rejects) and wastage of materials constitute a serious economic problem. At the beginning, it appeared mainly in the field of consumer goods. The diminishing quality of consumer goods became a serious matter hampering the improvement of living conditions, but it did not slow down the production process. At present, the production of unusable goods (rejects) has extended to the engineering industries, manufacture of tools and transportation equipment, etc. This threatens to interrupt the technical process of production and to disrupt the whole basis of the national economy.<sup>6</sup>

4. The combined result of all the preceding is the *collapse of the bureaucratic plan*, and the *crisis of productivity in terms of the overall yield of the economic apparatus*: There are “interruptions in production and . . . incomplete utilization of existing industrial capacity, . . . wastage of equipment and raw materials and . . . deficient and irregular supply of goods and services to the population,” as noted by Lange in a passage cited earlier.

Until now we have considered only the bureaucracy’s inability to plan rationally insofar as it results from the workers’ resistance to exploitation. Indeed, it is in this resistance that the fundamental cause of the failure of every plan, of all management imposed from outside the producers is to be found. But other causes, which pertain to the very nature of the bureaucracy, may be added to this one. We will mention only two of them.

First of all, planning is impossible without precise, readily available information. In particular, information is required on the results of production as the production process is occurring. Now, in a bureaucratic system the position of individual bureaucrats or groups of bureaucrats occupying a given place in the productive apparatus depends on the results that “they” have obtained—in reality or in *appearance*. And, unless an infinitely regressive system of supervision is set up, the central bureaucracy most often is obliged to be content with apparent results. *At the very most, it can supervise the quantity but not the quality of production*. Hence the unavoidable tendency of bureaucrats who direct factories or particular sectors of the economy to inflate the results they have obtained. Thus, the central planners rely for a large part on *imaginary* data. Here is what Lange says about it:

We must stop the race for purely quantitative indices which are obtained thanks to low quality and high costs. The results are purely fictitious, raw materials and human labor being used for the production of goods which do not achieve the intended economic effect nor, quite often, even the intended technical effect (e.g., agricultural machines unfit for use after a few weeks).<sup>7</sup>

Second, the bureaucratic system being a “civil service”-type system, the problem of nominating individuals to various posts and of promoting them be-

comes a fundamental one. Now, the bureaucracy has at its disposal no “objective” method for resolving this problem. On the other hand, a large part of the activity of bureaucrats as individuals involves their trying by any and every means to resolve *their own* personnel problem. In this way, the operation of cliques and clans takes on a fundamental sociological and economic significance: It radically undermines the entire “personnel policy” of the national economy from the top to the bottom—and therefore it undermines the national economy itself. In the article previously cited, Lange states that personnel policy in Poland is “generally unrelated to the efficiency of any given worker,” that it is founded on a “bureaucratic judgment based on various enquiries and on the workers’ connections with certain cliques,” and that it ends up replacing “experienced specialists” with “people without technical qualifications and of doubtful political background and moral standards.” Noting that “there has been a general lowering of technical standards in various branches of the national economy,” Lange calls for the elimination of “favoritism.”

Those who have even the least experience with the workings of a big capitalist enterprise know that the bureaucratic apparatus running it suffers from exactly the same vices, with respect to both the “information” problem and “personnel policy.”

### *The Situation in the Russian Factories*

As we have seen, the bureaucracy’s official spokespeople have recognized the workers’ resistance to exploitation in the satellite countries as well as the resulting failure of bureaucratic planning. In Russia’s case, we do not have comparable documents at our disposal. But a careful analysis of the reports given at the CPSU’s Twentieth Congress leads to similar conclusions.

While it is patting itself on the back for the “enthusiasm” and the “heroic labor” of its workers, the Russian bureaucracy repeatedly insists through its designated representatives that it is absolutely necessary to make individual workers materially interested in the results of production, to tie their wages to the “quality and quantity” of labor they furnish, etc. It thus exposes itself to the most glaring of contradictions, for if the workers were so “enthusiastic” about producing, the bureaucracy would not have to be so hell-bent on the need for piece-rate wages. This proves that the worker, in Russia as in Western countries, is completely hostile to production increases, for he sees in them increased exploitation. It also proves that the only way to get him interested in producing more is the lure of a bonus. But at the same time, the bureaucracy is obliged to admit that the system of individual bonuses is being constantly pushed aside, without the pressure of the workers. Thus Khrushchev complains that “there is still a great deal of disorganization and muddle in the system of wages and rate-setting. . . . There are frequent instances of wage-levelling. . . . It is necessary to put into effect consistently the principle of personal material incentives for workers. . . . It is necessary . . . to make wages directly dependent on the amount and quality of work done by each worker and make full use of the mighty lever of material incentives for raising labor productivity.”<sup>8</sup> He criticizes

certain “utopian views” upon whose basis “a negligent attitude to the socialist principle of material incentives began to take root.”<sup>9</sup>

Bulganin says coldly, “The present practice is to make output quotas correspond in effect to a definite wage level, and not to the technical and efficiency levels already achieved.”<sup>10</sup>

Kaganovich explains:

The fundamental defect in the organization of wages is obsolescence of the wage scale. In the majority of industries the base pay scale, the foundation of wage payments, has become particularly outdated. The average earnings of workers and employees in industry more than doubled from 1940 to 1955. But during this time the wage scale remained almost unchanged. As a result, a large gap has appeared between the increased actual earnings of workers and the wage scale rates. In order to arrive at the actual level of earnings, work quotas are kept low. The wage scales and work quotas thus are no longer completely the organizing basis in matters of raising labor productivity and earnings, since almost half the earnings come from overfulfillment of quotas, from bonuses and other additional payments. Owing to various overlays accumulated in the past twenty years, the wage scale contains elements of leveling. The gap between low wage rates and actual earnings is one of the reasons why the situation is unsatisfactory in the setting of work quotas.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Shvernik says:

It is necessary to be more resolute in introducing technically sound output norms, to avoid setting norms based upon the spirit of camaraderie and to revise them in accordance with changes in technology and organization of production, as well as in accordance with conditions of work ensuring an increase in labor productivity.<sup>12</sup>

Neither Taylor nor any capitalist employer would have the least problem signing his name to these statements. We discover here not only that the Russian bureaucracy cannot rely upon the workers being “enthusiastic” about producing (any more than French, English, or American capitalism can), nor only that the sole means it has at its disposal are bonuses for extra output. At the same time we see that, just as in the traditional capitalist factory, these bonuses are one gigantic fraud. First the workers are told: If you surpass the norm by 20 percent, your salary will be 20 percent higher. Once the norm is surpassed, they are told (under the pretext that the machinery has been modified or without any pretext at all): It has been proved that everyone can work at 120 percent; therefore it is “technically justified” for the norm to be raised henceforth to 120 percent. Of course, those who work at 20 percent above the new norm will be paid accordingly. This is exactly what Kaganovich and Shvernik are saying here. And the arguments about “improvements in machinery” are no more valid in this case than when they are advanced by capitalists. For it is still the workers who produce this machinery, and it is the workers who have paid for it—with the

nonremunerated part of their labor; if, therefore, it improves output, it is only the workers who should profit from it.

But there is much more. The bureaucracy claims to be running the economy—and in particular, to be setting wages by means of base rates and bonuses for extra output. In fact, these quotations make us realize that it succeeds in running things only in small part. For twenty-five years it has been proclaiming that wages ought to be geared to individual output; it invents Stakhanovism, it creates “labor heroes,” etc. And what do we see? That the pressure of the workers in the enterprises is such that “the present practice is to make output quotas correspond in effect to a definite wage level, and not to the technical and efficiency levels already achieved.” “The wage scales and work quotas thus are no longer completely the organizing basis in matters of raising labor productivity and earnings,” Kaganovich says. He might just as well have said, “For the past twenty-five years we just have been flapping in the wind as far as the organization of labor and wages is concerned.” How can “planning” based on a given rate of wages and given production norms operate if this rate and these norms “no longer are the basic organizing principle”? What Shvernik politely calls “setting norms based upon the spirit of camaraderie” clearly means the following: Neither production bonuses nor Stakhanovism, neither the GPU nor concentration camps, provide the Russian factory director with the means to discipline workers and to *impose* on them a set of norms and pay rates. He is obliged to *come to terms* with them. And it is obvious why. The workers need only quietly and systematically sabotage production for the enterprise to fail to carry out its “plan” and for the director to lose his head or his job. The director therefore has to make concessions, and consequently he screws with the “plan.” What “planning” is worth under such conditions—from the strictly technical point of view, we mean—is only too easy to comprehend.

Another fundamental feature in the workers’ struggle is to be found in this standardization Khrushchev is complaining about, those “elements of leveling,” that make Kaganovich so unhappy. This clearly means not only that the factory director often<sup>13</sup> is unsuccessful in controlling the enterprise’s total wage bill (i.e., the workers insist on a given overall amount of pay, a given work pace, which the director then “justifies” to his higher-ups by inventing work norms corresponding to them), but also that he no longer succeeds in determining how wages will be *distributed* within the enterprise. Evidently, the workers are successful in getting norms set in such a fashion that everyone in the production process (bureaucrats’ salaries are another matter) gets nearly the same wage for an “honest” amount of work. Thus we find that in the Russian factory the workers’ struggle against wage differentiations goes as far, if not further, than it does in the French or American factory. We know how important protests against hierarchy have become in Poland and in the Hungarian Revolution.

### *Stagnation of Workers’ Living Standards and the Income of Bureaucrats*

Year after year the bureaucracy’s official statistics announce large increases in the population’s standard of living. A favorite theme of Stalinist propaganda in

France and elsewhere is that in Russia and in the “popular democracies,” living standards are rising rapidly while they might be stagnating or even declining in capitalist countries.

In fact, the rapid development of living standards (rapid by comparison to previous periods of economic history) is a general phenomenon of modern economies, in particular of developed industrial countries. Statistics amply demonstrate this fact, and it can be verified in everyone’s individual experience, too. The difference in this respect between private capitalist countries and the bureaucratic capitalist countries, if it is real, can be only a difference of degree. But even as such its existence is dubious. For 1955, the official figures concerning the “volume of retail sales in State stores and cooperatives” show the following amount of growth over 1954: Russia, 5 percent; Czechoslovakia, 11 percent; East Germany, 6 percent; Bulgaria, 12 percent; Hungary, 5 percent; Poland, 11 percent; Romania, 5 percent (*Economic Bulletin*, pp. 34-35). Insofar as these figures leave aside “sales on the open market” (which basically involves a part of the food-products sector and should increase less rapidly as the standard of living rises), they rather overestimate the increase in total consumption. Whatever is the case, we need only compare them to the percentage increases in private consumption in Western countries to discover that there is nothing exceptional about them: According to the *Statistical Bulletin* of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (September-October, 1956, pp. 103-18), private consumption during the same period increased 10 percent in Austria, 1 percent in Belgium, 7.5 percent in France, 11 percent in West Germany, 4 percent in Italy, 7.5 percent in the Netherlands, 3 percent in Sweden and in the United Kingdom, 7 percent in Canada, and 7.5 percent in the United States. A thorough comparison would have to cover several years and take into account various other factors—but the basic similarity of situations is beyond doubt.

In the second place, the *overall* percentage increases in consumption published by Eastern countries mask—just as those published by capitalist countries do—the fact that the rise in certain categories of income (more precisely, the incomes of privileged groups) might be more rapid than that of working-class wages. We will return to the significance of income differentiation in bureaucratic countries. Here we need only recall that an overall increase in “consumption” of 5 percent can signify an increase of 0 percent for workers and 20 percent for bureaucrats.

But the most important thing is that the figures published by the bureaucracy are for the most part false. They often are false, in part, in capitalist countries, notably because the price indexes used are not representative or are even deliberately manipulated (this is what is happening at the moment in France). But they are practically never false to the degree that they are in the case of Eastern European countries. We needed the Polish crisis to make us aware of the extent of these falsifications.

According to Gomulka, the 27 percent increase in real wages in Poland during the period of the Six-Year Plan (1949-55) was “a mere juggling of figures, which deceived no one and only irritated people more.” This signifies that the 11 percent increase in 1955 indicated earlier here for this country is in large part

or totally imaginary. Here indeed is what the Economic Commission for Europe said about it six months before Gomulka:

During the six years 1949 to 1955 average money wages in Poland increased by 130 percent and the official retail price index 80 percent. The increase of 28 percent in net [i.e., real—Au.] wages implied by the comparison of these two figures . . . is, however, certainly too high. . . . A rough calculation of the increase in the cost of purchasing the fixed basket of goods and services covered by the cost-of-living index which was in use in 1949, gives a percentage increase of 130 percent—i.e., about equal to the rise in the average real wages. But this too may be wide of the truth, if only because of the not very satisfactory nature of the basket. Nevertheless, the conclusion can hardly be avoided that real wages in the less favored branches of the economy appear to have fallen not only relatively but absolutely. (*Economic Bulletin*, May 1956, p. 30)

In other words, on the basis of the price index in use in 1949 (which already was “not very satisfactory”), the increase in real wages over six years in Poland was *nil*. And, more cleverly than a French politician like Ramadier, the Polish bureaucracy has cooked up a fake index in order to persuade people . . . that they were living better.

On the other hand, the standard of living is deteriorating as a function of a factor that cannot be represented in statistics: the crisis in productivity as expressed in the lowered *quality* of goods. Lange says that “the diminishing quality of consumer goods became a serious matter hampering the improvement of living conditions” (p. 146). Quoting *Szabad Nep* (June 19, 1956), the Economic Commission for Europe wrote:

The problem of choice and of quality—Czechoslovakia perhaps excepted—is still of extreme importance to the consumer in spite of recent improvements. . . . In Hungary, over the past six years, “the quality of a number of consumer goods has deteriorated owing to an exaggerated drive for quantitative results. As in these circumstances the new purchases become more frequently necessary, because of the lower quality of commodities, real wages were accordingly reduced.” (*Economic Bulletin*, August 1956, p. 34)

Compared with the workers’ situation, consumption in the privileged bureaucratic strata has developed unrestrainedly. We cannot dwell upon this question here, for the fragmentary character of the statistical data would require too detailed an analysis. It is sufficient for our purposes to cite Lange, who notes that “an excessive bureaucratic apparatus . . . has spread in all fields. This apparatus impedes the functioning of the economy and diverts an undue proportion of national income to unproductive use” (p. 153). Nevertheless, we may affirm the following: Taking into account the fact that the incomes of Western capitalists are used in large part to finance investment, which is, in bureaucratic countries, financed by the “State,” the distribution of *consumable* income in these latter countries hardly seems less unequal than in the former. When, as

frequently happens, a bureaucrat enjoys an income (which includes both his official salary and the various perquisites from which he benefits) twenty, thirty, or fifty times higher than the worker's average salary, we must conclude that this income is devoted exclusively to his consumption, and compare it not to a French or English capitalist's *return on investment* but to the amount he *consumes*.

### *The Meaning of the Workers' Critique*

Stalinists in France and elsewhere try to explain the workers' revolt in Poland and in Hungary in terms of the *absolute* low standard of living, and this low living standard, in turn, is explained in terms of the poverty of these countries, their backwardness, the devastation of the war, etc.

Here again, as in all their propaganda, Stalinists are more and more reduced to spouting absurdities. The working class is not revolting against the low standard of living as such, in the absolute—a notion that indeed hardly makes any sense at all. The working class is revolting against the *stagnation* of its living standards at the end of many years of inhuman labor; it is revolting against its misery *compared* to the luxury of bureaucratic parasites; it is revolting, last but not least, against the immense amount of *wastefulness* the bureaucracy creates in the factories and in the economy, against the fact that some half-seconds of allotted time are being shaved off under the pretext of increasing production while at the same moment *millions of hours* of social labor are purely and simply wiped out by the anarchy and incompetence of their brilliant bosses.

This is clearly shown in the workers' protests in Hungary, which principally are directed against hierarchy and aimed at workers' management of the factories.

### **The Political Evolution of "De-Stalinization"**

The bureaucracy claims to be "communist." It has organized the economy in a so-called socialist fashion; it has nationalized factories, it has subjected production to a "plan." But it has changed nothing in the real situation of the workers. In production, the workers remain subject to the total power of the factory's managerial apparatus. In this managerial apparatus, the personnel alone have been changed—and not in every instance; but its spirit, its methods, and its role remain exactly the same as under private capitalism: to extract the greatest amount of labor possible from the workers by combining direct coercion, speed-ups, and production bonuses, and to deny the workers the least right to organize and to set the pace of their work. Just like the French, English, or American worker, the Polish, Czech, or Hungarian worker is transformed into a mere cog in the machine, into a soulless body who has nothing to say either about his own work or about that of his shop or factory. Without the right to strike (strikes are characterized as "crimes against the socialist State"), without the right to form an organization to defend his interests (the official trade-union organizations are merely a subbranch of the factory's management whose essential function is to raise output), and consigned to arbitrary treatment in the hands of a foreman or

the lowest party functionary, the worker has seen exploitation come crashing down on him as heavily as before, if not even more so.

He has seen too that his exploitation was serving the same ends as under private capitalism. On the one hand, he was exploited so that an ever greater number of new factories and machines could be built. On the other hand, his exploitation has enabled a stratum of parasites who no longer are his old bosses but bureaucrats—factory managers, technicians, military people, intellectuals, leaders of the unions, the party and the State—to enjoy a privileged existence.

The proletariat has seen that this regime, which claimed to be “communist,” was simply another form of the capitalist system of rule in which the bureaucracy has taken the place of private employers. It has seen that “nationalization” and “planning” have not changed its situation in the least. Totalitarian dictatorship has prevented it from organizing, from talking freely, from reading or hearing on the radio anything but official lies. But totalitarian dictatorship has not been and never will be able to prevent the workers from seeing the reality of the situation in which they live, which is their perpetual enslavement to a stratum of managers and rulers who almost invariably squander their labor; all of production is organized toward extorting still more output out of them, and their misery contrasts with the luxurious lives of these parasites. Nor can it prevent them from resenting as the most infamous of affronts the speeches of these rulers wherein all this is presented as “socialism” and the “reign of the working class.”

This totalitarian dictatorship cannot now and never will in the future be able to prevent the workers from struggling against exploitation by the means that always are at the disposal of the exploited: their refusal to cooperate in production, which can be manifested in an infinite number of ways. Modern industry simply cannot function without a minimum of cooperation on the workers’ part, without a display of their initiative and of their organizational capacities that surpasses by far what the workers officially are supposed to do and that cannot be extorted from them through coercion. As far back as 1950, workers’ resistance within the production process had attained such a degree of intensity that the economy of the satellite countries entered into a terrible crisis whose depth can be measured only today.

This crisis situation, let us repeat, is not peculiar to the satellite countries. It rages on in the USSR as well. But it is bound to be more grave where the bureaucracy is the youngest, where it has been implanted in the most artificial manner, and especially where it finds itself faced with a more mature working class. Having existed longer and having developed a higher class consciousness, the proletariat in the satellite countries allows things to happen only with much greater difficulty. It reacts more resolutely against exploitation. Under the Stalinist regime in Russia, despite the bureaucracy’s lack of cohesion and its incompetence, there was no overt crisis from 1928 to 1941, basically because the proletariat was constantly being diluted by the enormous influx of young peasants for whom entrance into the factories objectively and subjectively meant an important economic and social step forward. But since the war tensions no doubt have been mounting in Russian factories, too. Thus, as we have seen at the Twentieth Congress, the bureaucracy’s leaders have been obliged to recog-



nize that most of the time, in circumvention of all official rules, factory directors have been incapable of setting work norms and that these norms as well as the distribution of wages were in fact the result of compromise. After Stalin's death, the new team of rulers understood that for a long time to come it would be unable to rule in the old authoritarian way. It therefore tried to ward off a conflict by introducing a certain number of concessions. Here we have the meaning of "de-Stalinization."<sup>14</sup>

This new team was driven to de-Stalinization by the situation in Russia. But it was driven to it just as much by the situation in the satellite countries. In particular, a key part was played by those satellite countries in which there was a relatively more mature proletariat. Having experienced capitalism, the working class in these countries did not confuse the construction of new factories with socialism. It knew that accumulating the instruments of production has always been the principal concern of the bosses. And it knew too what the Bulgarian or Romanian peasant, having been turned into a worker, is in the process of finding out (and this is also what the Chinese peasant will come to know in fifteen or twenty years' time), namely, that whatever the pace of progress in the production process and whatever the miracles of "socialist accumulation," his body and his mind are more and more being brought under the control of the infernal rhythms of the machinery.

And it is precisely in these satellite countries where a working class experienced with capitalism had already existed that the workers' revolt against the bureaucracy exploded openly. In East Germany, when the workers rose up in June 1953, they battled with arms in hand against these so-called communist bureaucrats, proclaimed, "We are the true Communists" and demanded "a metalworkers' government." Almost at the same time, strikes and working-class riots broke out in Czechoslovakia

From then on, the Russian bureaucracy, along with the bureaucracies of the satellite countries, tried to "soften" its course. Sensing that the home front was anything but secure, the bureaucracy sought rapprochement with the Western imperialists; it reached a tacit agreement with them on a halt to the arms race and, limiting its military production, it tried to appease the workers with a few concessions on their standard of living. Then it tried to change its political face: It attempted to present Stalin as individually responsible for all the exploitation and all the crimes it had committed, stating that it was going to "democratize" itself. Here we have the political meaning of the Twentieth Congress.

If it could deceive in this way a few disoriented intellectuals and a variety of washed-up political derelicts, it did not deceive the workers of the countries it dominated. For the workers, "democracy" has never signified and will never signify anything but this: the right to organize themselves as they want to, to be able to meet together and to express themselves freely. For them, quite correctly, everything else is just empty talk. The bureaucratic countries were—and they still are—very far from that point. The real situation had not changed, either from this standpoint or from the economic one. On the other hand, the workers sensed that the bureaucracy was not making concessions out of the goodness of its heart, that it had been frightened by the East Berlin revolt and the events in

Czechoslovakia, and that the bureaucracy was handing out a few bribes only to the extent that the workers had battled with it openly and had tried to overthrow it. The lesson of 1953 had not been lost on the workers of Eastern Europe: Struggle alone pays, and a one-day revolt, even if it is beaten, does more to improve the workers' lot than ten years of "planning" and empty talk about "joyful tomorrows." The workers correctly interpreted the bureaucracy's few "concessions" and the declarations of the Twentieth Congress for what they were: a sign of tremendous weakness.

From that time on an extraordinary state of excitement and ferment seized hold of most of the satellite countries. Long contained within the factories, the working class's reaction now began to move out-of-doors. It was refracted into all social circles, and in particular among the young. It infiltrated into the base of the bureaucratic organizations, its parties and trade unions, and began to wear away at them.

The bureaucracy quickly found itself incapable of mastering a revolt by an entire society. Through some spasmodic measures (rehabilitating former "traitors," promising more freedom, pathetically recognizing its "mistakes," changing its ruling personnel and replacing them with bureaucrats who were capable of giving the impression that they were "leftists" or "oppositionists"), it tried to appease the population and to show that something "had really changed." Khrushchev's trip to Belgrade in June and Tito's to Yalta in October were attempts to demonstrate that Russia now was capable of recognizing the de facto "independence" of the satellite countries. But it also expressed the growing anguish of Moscow's bureaucrats as well as those in Belgrade faced with a developing revolt. Both sets of bureaucrats felt it would be almost impossible to avoid the domestic repercussions of this revolt.

### **The Polish Crisis and Gomulka**

To no avail. In July, at Poznan, the workers at the Stalin factory gave the signal for an open revolt against the regime; they defied the tanks, some of which they soon afterward took possession of, aided and abetted by some soldiers and some low-ranking army officers, and they tried to occupy government buildings. With their simple and profound slogans ("Bread," "Democracy," "Freedom," "It's Our Revolution," "Down with the Big Shots"), they demonstrated both that "de-Stalinization" had in reality changed nothing and that the workers, having experienced bureaucracy, were perfectly capable of identifying the men and the system responsible for their being exploited.

The Poznan revolt was defeated. Its repercussions in the country and in the other satellite countries, however, were enormous. The Polish, Russian, and Yugoslavian bureaucracies and the barefaced liars from the French CP daily, *Humanité*, tried to present it as an uprising of reactionary elements supported by the Americans. But no one in the satellite countries believed the bureaucracy's lies about the Poznan revolt. The attitude of the Yugoslavs, who systematically kept word of the Poznan trials secret, shows this clearly, if such proof was

needed. On the contrary, all the visible signs and everything that could be inferred from the changes in the bureaucracy's attitude show that the Poznan revolt had given the signal for the workers to attack in several countries—and in the very first place, in Poland and in Hungary.

From July to October, Poland lived in a state of extraordinary ferment. The masses began to take over the political stage. The Stalinist bureaucratic apparatus, which, with de-Stalinization, had already lost its internal cohesion and many crucial control posts—the political police, for example, turned against it—found itself utterly incapable of dominating the situation. Meeting after meeting contradicted the official slogans, expressed the workers' distrust of all the usual empty talk, and demanded real changes. The base of the bureaucratic apparatus—the rank-and-file “militants” and petty cadres—lost all cohesion. Put under tremendous pressure by the working-class masses and seeing its entire ideology, which had kept it going for decades, crumbling away (rulers = brilliant and infallible chiefs; the opposition = treason; the Party = the party of the working class; nationalization + planning = socialism, etc.), it became sensitized to the working-class protests. This pressure was transmitted into the bureaucratic apparatus, whose summits, themselves in a state of decay, seized with fear, undecided as to which of several lines to follow, and no longer having the confidence of Moscow—where Khrushchev piled up gaffe upon gaffe, first with the July 20 resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU, and ending with his surprise trip to Warsaw with fourteen generals—floundered for three months before finding the “solution”: call back Gomulka, because he was at that time the sole possible cover “on the Left” on account of his opposition since 1949 to the dominant tendency, his “Polish” (clandestine chief of the Polish CP since 1943 and thereby opposed to the Moscow emigrés who returned in 1945) and “pro-Titoist” past, and his working-class origins.

In recalling Gomulka to power, the Polish bureaucracy knew that it was going to run up against Moscow, which, full of impotent rage, saw the situation more and more escaping from its control. But it could do nothing else. The liquidation of the most compromised fraction of the Stalinist leadership of the Party, the State, and the economy was the least it could do if it wanted to contain the mass movement, which was starting to take on extraordinary proportions. We now know that during the October 20-21 session of the Polish Party's Central Committee, during which Gomulka was recalled to power, the entire population, headed by workers and students, was on a war footing and ready to battle against a coup d'Etat by the Stalinist fraction. The ferment reached its height with the news of Khrushchev's arrival in Warsaw with his fourteen generals. The workers remained in the factories, ready to intervene en masse against an armed strike by the Russians and their tool, Marshal Rokossovsky. Sections of the army and the political police already were on a war footing. The Russians understood that under such conditions it was not a matter of a simple “police operation,” still less of a “coup d'Etat” of one Polish fraction against another, and that they would have to undertake military operations on the scale of a real war. Thinking they could preserve at least a minimum of control over the situ-

ation in Poland through the intermediary of the Party—which proved totally impossible two weeks later in Budapest—they effected what they no doubt thought was a tactical retreat.

*The Present Revolutionary Situation in Poland and the Contradictions of Gomulism*

While historically unprecedented, the present situation in Poland is no less clearly a revolutionary situation. The odious crimes of the previous regime are laid out in broad daylight; the exploitative and oppressive character of the bureaucracy that has been in power for ten years has become a commonplace; every attempt to return to an even remotely similar regime is completely out of the question; and (bourgeois) “restorationist” tendencies are practically nonexistent. Meetings of workers and students take place constantly and no one can prevent them. No one can be stopped from saying what he thinks. Demands for changing the hierarchy of wages, for workers’ management of the factories, and for democracy are being formulated and discussed all the time.

On the other hand, we still are not witnessing the formation of mass soviet organs, workers’ councils, or similar kinds of committees. The transformation of the existing political and trade-union organizations, however, is extremely profound. The character of the Communist party—of the “Polish United Workers Party”—has changed.<sup>a</sup> Whatever survivals of the past there might be in places—Stalinist nuclei being able to survive in any kind of party organization, the remnants of the bureaucratic mentality nearly anywhere—the great majority of the Polish Party’s militants and middle-level cadres at present still take their stand on communist ground. Already, the collapse of the regime and of Stalinist ideology, the practical understanding of its origins and its consequences, the opposition to Russian imperialism, the lesson of the Hungarian Revolution, and above all, the pressure and the demands of the Polish working-class masses have completely transformed the mentality of these militants. The entrance of new working-class elements into the Party, who bring with themselves a proletarian mentality and proletarian demands, reinforces these factors to an extraordinary degree. These changes are not merely psychological. They are inscribed here and now in objective facts, which, while they certainly are not “irreversible,” could be challenged only through a long process of evolution and at the cost of creating new conflicts: *For the first time since 1927, there is free discussion within a Communist party.* Here we have an enormously important fact. Within the Polish Party people already are rejecting the stupid “personality cult” theory and the idea that “mistakes” were made by Stalin or Beria: They are demanding that Stalinism—that is to say, bureaucratic capitalism as a *total and coherent system*, as an economic, political, social, and ideological whole—be analyzed. Some analyses going in this direction—which may be judged as timid from Paris, but which have the merit of actually existing and being made by people who have lived through the experience of the bureaucratic system—already are appearing in the Polish press. Some discussions are beginning to take place even about the Leninist conception of the Party, and the criticisms a certain Polish revolution-

ary, Rosa Luxemburg, was starting to formulate in 1918 against the dictatorship of the Central Committee over the Party and of the Party over the masses, are being brought back out of the Stalinist dungeons. Under such conditions, no matter what the past and the subjective intentions of the members of the Party's leadership, of Gomulka, of Ochab, of Cyrankiewicz, it is obvious that they can rule only insofar as they move with this irresistible current.

Similar transformations are taking place within the trade-union movement. Since the days of the Warsaw October, the character of trade-union organizations has changed. The bureaucratic apparatus, whose function under the Stalinist regime was to pressure the worker to produce, is in the process of being liquidated. The workers have invaded previously deserted trade-union meetings. During the November Trade-Union Congress in Warsaw one could see the 120 official delegates who theoretically made up the Congress pushed aside by a thousand delegates spontaneously sent from the grass roots; they overturned the Congress's agenda and substance, forced the unions to open up their "account books" (in the fullest sense of this phrase), and transformed the Congress into a relentless indictment of the misdeeds of the trade-union bureaucracy.

The differences in the Polish and Hungarian situations are as important as their profound similarities are incontestable. Educated by the experience of bureaucratic capitalism, the mass movement in both cases exhibits an extraordinary strength. In Hungary, this strength is expressed by the destruction of all existing institutions and through open conflict with Russian imperialism. In Poland, it expresses itself in a thorough transformation of the character of the most important institutions—the Party and the trade unions—and in the setback inflicted upon Russian imperialism.

In Poland, therefore, the situation is entirely open, and the future of the Communist party is equally so. At the same time, both the Polish Revolution and the policy of the Polish Party are caught in a series of objective contradictions. To shed light on these contradictions, to try to analyze them clearly, is the principal condition for being able to surmount them.

On the other hand, the Polish Revolution leads to the destruction of Russian imperialism's domination over the country. And at the same time it constitutes an open wound on the flanks of the bureaucratic world. Its power of contagion is tremendous. It already has given the signal to the Hungarian Revolution. *Tribuna Ludu* copies are all sold out a few minutes after they arrive in Moscow, and the Russian bureaucracy cannot stop it from happening. But at the same time, the Polish Revolution cannot openly defy Russia. The Russian bureaucracy lies in wait for the Polish Revolution, ready to strangle it one way or another at the first opportunity.

Under such conditions, the leadership of the Polish Party is obliged to come to terms with the Kremlin. The Russo-Polish accord signed during Gomulka's latest trip to Moscow offers, like all compromises, positive and negative sides. In signing the accord, the Russian bureaucracy makes it much more difficult for it to intervene later on; it has been obliged to recognize that it has exploited Poland from 1945 to 1953; it has renounced further exploitation and now pledges to fur-

nish economic aid. On the other hand, Gomulka is obliged to accept the stationing of Russian troops in Poland, which contains dangers for the future; and he signed a statement approving in fact, although indirectly, the Russians' crushing of the Hungarian Revolution (the accord does not speak of Russian intervention or of Kádár, but of the Polish and Russian governments' support "for the worker and peasant government of Hungary"). Here we already have a concession on principles, which one day or another can be turned back against Poland itself.

The goal of all compromises is to gain time. Under present circumstances, the Polish Revolution has to gain some time, on the one hand because the crisis of the bureaucracy makes the Polish Revolution here and now the order of the day in Russia and in other places and, in any case, limits the Kremlin's opportunities for intervention, and on the other hand because it needs to be able to carry on, expand, and deepen in Poland itself. And it is especially from this last standpoint that the compromise reached with the Russian bureaucracy will take on its ultimate signification: It will have been positive if it permits the development of the revolution in the country.

The development of the revolution within Poland itself encounters contradictions that are just as profound as those found in the area of foreign relations. The economic situation bequeathed by the Stalinist regime is very chaotic. Coordination of various sectors of production has to start over again from scratch. After ten years of forced collectivization and of plundering the peasantry through ground-rent levies, it will be tremendously difficult to integrate the peasantry into the appropriate economic channels. On the political plane, and more profoundly on the plane of the organization of social life in all its aspects, mass organs do not exist—although, as we have seen, the character of the Communist party has experienced profound transformations. The Stalinist bureaucracy is continually being eliminated from the top posts in the economy and in the State. But a "purged" leadership apparatus continues to manage the economy. The State apparatus has changed personnel, but not its objective character; it remains a separate apparatus, made up of a permanent and, in principle, irremovable bureaucracy.

We must stop here and try to deepen our examination of these contradictions, starting with the problem that is the most basic and that thereby escapes the notice of those who today talk on and on at the periphery of the Polish Revolution. This is the problem of workers' management of the economy.

Workers' management of production is the obvious, indisputable, conscious, and explicit conclusion Eastern European workers are drawing from the experience of bureaucratic capitalism. Obviously, none of them have thought for an instant of bringing back private employers. But neither can one have confidence now in any sort of ruling bureaucracy, even a "democratic" or "revolutionary" one. For years we have been exposing this bureaucracy for what it is, using documents, statistics, and arguments. But the Hungarian or Polish worker has had intimate, firsthand experience of it. He experiences it not only as an exploiting stratum *but as a stratum that is incapable of managing production*. It is the bureau-

cratic management of the economy that has gone bankrupt in the Eastern European proletariat's eyes. Insofar as it takes action, this proletariat therefore is driven inevitably to the following conclusion: The only remaining solution is the organization of production by the producers themselves.

The Polish Workers Party recognizes this situation and the corresponding demands of the workers. It hesitates, nevertheless, and it proposes to inaugurate, as an "experimental" measure, a kind of workers' management in certain factories. But there can be no question of mere experimentation. In the Polish situation, workers' management is the sole possibility for starting up the economy and production again quickly; otherwise at the end of a period of chaos, it will be necessary to return under one form or another to a bureaucratic system pure and simple. Neither can it be a question of limiting management *to a few* factories, nor of limiting it *to the factories*—thus leaving the functions of coordination and management of the economy as a whole to a bureaucratic apparatus.

On the one hand, if workers' management is *effective* within particular factories—and not a mystification, like Tito's "comanagement"—the workers will abolish hierarchy and work norms. Discipline concerning matters relating to production will be established by the workers themselves—and will be that much more effective. But that cannot happen in each individual factory without any coordination with the others, for all rationalization of the productive process as a whole would become impossible. Once "competition" and the capitalist "market" are abolished, this rationalization effort presupposes that all the individual units of production are regulated in some overall fashion. There are only two ways of establishing this overall regulation: either by abstract and impersonal *production norms* that must be defined and imposed from outside—and this is the function of a separate bureaucratic apparatus—or by assemblies of representatives from the workers' councils of each enterprise, which, branch by industrial branch, will try to standardize and rationalize the methods and pace of production in a vital way while taking into account the concrete conditions of each enterprise.

On the other hand, the workers' council managing a particular factory is obliged to attend to the rest of the economy. Its stocking of machines and raw materials and its disposal of the goods produced depend upon it. It will distribute wages, whose buying power depends on what happens everywhere else in the economy (and in particular in the agricultural sector). The problem of the centralized direction of the economy is thus posed in all its acuity. It too can be resolved in two ways: Either workers' councils will be formed, will federate with each other on the national level, will include representatives from village or district peasants' councils, and will take on the whole set of tasks involved in directing the economy (including the functions of "planning," all of this being the sole route leading toward socialism), or else the tasks of central direction will remain in the hands of a bureaucracy separate from the producers, in which case a reversal of the process will in the end be inevitable, and workers' management in individual factories itself will lose its meaning and will be transformed into a means for riveting the workers to a production process over which they will again have no power.

For the moment, the Polish Party has a hesitant and contradictory attitude toward this question. On the one hand, it states that its ultimate objective is workers' management. On the other hand, it hesitates to commit itself to this route. The economic program adopted in July by the Seventh Plenum of its Central Committee (and whose main features are found in the article by O. Lange that we have cited several times) was nothing more than a program for cleaning up the bureaucratic economy and putting it in order. This program was intended to overcome the crisis in production, the famous "nihilism" of the workers, by reintroducing typically capitalist procedures like "material incentives" and "economic stimulants"—in other words, by piecework. It was intended to overcome the anarchy of planning by rationalizing the hierarchy; from now on, this hierarchy should be based upon "economic efficiency" rather than on "clans and political intrigues." In this context, the call for "considerably enlarging the workers' participation in the direction of enterprises" has lost all objective meaning: Every exploitative regime is all for this today, since the bankruptcy of the bureaucratic method of directing production has become evident, even to the exploiters themselves. The reports of the Twentieth Congress of the Russian Party are filled with calls to factory managers aimed at "making the workers associates in the operation of the enterprises." And in the West, capitalism in its turn tries to persuade the workers to let it know their opinions about how to produce. But all these efforts run aground, for the workers know that they have no say over management decisions and that the managers will eventually use their collaboration to integrate them even further into the production process and to exploit them even more; likewise, "economic stimulants" fail when they encounter the growing resistance workers exhibit toward piecework and toward wage differentiations.

The program of the Seventh Plenum is outstripped by the reality of the situation—though the official program of the Polish Party remains in place. It is clear, however, that the route of "economic stimulants," of piecework, of norms set by a bureaucracy separated from the production process, sooner or later becomes the road back to economic domination by the bureaucracy.

The same contradictions are found again on the "political" level—which is in reality the plane of overall social life. The Party has changed its character, but it remains *de facto* and *de jure* the supreme instance of power. Whatever its character, can a party lead society to socialism—or does not this passage to socialism imply rather that the masses, organized in councils or in other soviet-style organs, must take their fate into their own hands? Can the dictatorship of the proletariat be the dictatorship of a party? These are neither theoretical questions nor sectarian subtleties. They are the supreme questions of our age, and the fate of the Polish Revolution depends, in the most practical and immediate way, on the response to them.

We think the entire experience of the last forty years and the analysis of the current situation allow us to respond in the most categorical fashion to this question. Working-class power can be nothing other than the power of mass working-class organs. The dictatorship of the proletariat is not the dictatorship



of a party but rather the power of workers' councils that realizes, at the same time, the greatest amount of proletarian democracy. Either the Party, the State apparatus, and the apparatus for directing the economy will wither away as they are reabsorbed into mass organs that will take on managerial functions on all levels, or else they will separate themselves off from the masses, reduce them to silence, and develop according to their own logic toward a totalitarian bureaucracy, whatever forms it may take. The problem of the Party's role in the dictatorship of the proletariat is the problem of the *reunification of social life that is indispensable for the realization of socialism*. What is happening at this moment in Poland? What runs the risk of happening in a much more clear-cut fashion tomorrow? On the one side, there is the real life of people, in production and elsewhere. On the other side, there is an apparatus running the economy that, to run things efficiently, should be made up of representatives of the producers, and which in fact is not. In the third place, there is a State apparatus that is itself also separated from those whom it has to administer. And heading it all up, there is the Party, which is trying one way or another to coordinate all this. This last entity is a living contradiction, for either it actually is coordinating things—in which case, it is the sole instance of power and all the rest is merely smoke and mirrors—or else it is not coordinating things—and then it is superfluous as a governmental organ (and not, of course, as a “political” and “ideological” group).

In other words, either the real social life of society, in all its aspects, will become identical with a single network of institutions, the councils, or else the traditional institutions—Party, State, the management of the economy and of the factories—separated from the mass of people and thereby from their real life as well, will rise up anew above society and, having become again the incarnation of a particular social category, will dominate it.

From this viewpoint, which ultimately is the most important one, the Polish situation contains very serious negative elements. First of all, the movement of the masses has not culminated till now in the formation of councils. The Party has channeled this movement not only “ideologically” and “politically” but also organizationally. We do not know to what extent it has helped to prevent the formation of councils—which would prove at any rate that it was possible to prevent their formation. Besides, there can be no question of the Party creating councils by decree. What is clear is that the spontaneous mass movement has remained till now on the near side of constituting organs of power.

By its ambiguity, however, the Party's very attitude contains a host of dangers. The Party finds itself in a situation that is unique in history. Most of its members have just made great strides in the space of a few months, its structures have been regenerated, and its ties with the workers are being reinforced. Beyond it, however, no organs representative of the working class exist. In such a situation, it can try to contribute with all the means at its disposal to the development of the mass movement. Or, it can fall back on itself, thinking that the achievement of socialism is its own business and that it will find in itself all the solutions it needs.

We must not hide the fact that a host of indications show that the Party in-

clines dangerously toward the second solution. When Gomulka said, “The process of democratization can only be directed by the United Workers Party,” this not only was a contradiction in terms (i.e., a democratization effort led by a de facto unique party). It expressed at the same time the Party’s will to maintain for itself a monopoly on power—and thereby it also compromises the chances for developing the mass movement. When the Party remains up in the air on the crucial question of workers’ management, it reinforces the chances for the process of bureaucratization to begin anew. However great the amount of democracy there is within the Party, when the constitution of working-class political organizations is still prohibited the proletariat’s possibilities for controlling the situation remain dangerously limited.

No one can give lessons to the Polish Revolution, and one would have to be blind not to see the tremendous difficulties facing the Polish Communists and the courage they exhibit in attacking them. These problems are being discussed intensely in Poland at the present hour—and the revolutionary movement in other countries has the right and the duty to know both the strength of the Polish Revolution and the foreign and domestic dangers lying in wait for it.

### **The Future of the Hungarian Revolution**

After the second Russian intervention and the constitution of Kádár’s puppet government, the true proletarian and socialist character of the Hungarian Revolution was manifested with still more clarity than before. As was said, the shopkeepers left their stores during the second week of the insurrection; they went back inside for good after the third week. Apart from the Russian tanks, the sole real power existing in the country, the force of workers organized in their councils, hung in there, organized the general strike, and kept up its demands when it did not actually deepen them.

The demands posed by the councils to Kádár at various times since November 11 include:

- Workers’ management of the factories (although Kádár already had “decreed” it);
- The constitution of workers’ councils in all branches, *including State administrative offices*;
- The right of the councils to publish their own newspapers;
- The withdrawal of the Russian troops;
- The constitution of working-class militias;
- The recognition of the councils as organs representative of the working class;
- The recognition of the political role of the councils; and
- The return of Imre Nagy to power, and hence the resignation of the current government.

The import of these demands does not need to be analyzed. We should em-

phasize simply that in posing them at the moment when everything in the country seemed to be bowing before the Russian terror, and in presenting some of them rather than others according to the tactical situation of the moment, the councils showed their ability to take the viewpoint of the population as a whole, and thereby also their capacity to be the *sole leadership* of the society.

From its first day, people have been in a hurry to bury the Hungarian Revolution. We are writing these lines on December 9, 1956, and this revolution which has lasted forty-eight days is as alive as ever. Despite deportations and nocturnal arrests of council members, these members do not give up their resistance. Indeed, should the more or less open struggle cease for a while, that would provide no more of a solution for the Russians or for Kádár. Henceforth the Hungarian regime is considered by the whole population as temporary—for the same reason that the Nazi occupation was considered so during the war—and this determines people's attitude toward Kádár as well as his inability to re-establish a State machine functioning at a satisfactory level. The Russians are faced with an insoluble dilemma: to leave is to admit a tremendous defeat and to show to all the peoples they oppress that they need only fight with sufficient determination to win. It also is to open the way to proletarian revolution and socialism in Hungary and to the irresistible appeal its example would furnish to other countries in the East. To remain is not only to maintain in this country a chaotic situation leading nowhere; in the final analysis, it is to import the revolution into Russia, for the Russian soldiers stationed in Hungary are becoming increasingly contaminated by what is going on there, and through them these events contaminate a steadily growing segment of the Russian population. And this is happening at the moment when the manifestations of the crisis in Russia's own regime are growing; when Khrushchev acknowledges that the attitude of Russian youth to the regime does not differ that much from the attitude of Hungarian youth; when more and more severe warnings are addressed to intellectuals who do not understand the limits to their role as the bureaucracy's entertainers; and when, added to these unmistakable signs of the approaching storm, there are subterranean rumblings of working-class anger that no longer can be stifled, of a proletariat that numbers forty million individuals and that thinks, as the official organ of the Russian trade unions is compelled to write, that "our administration is only a bureaucracy, our trade unions only assemblies of functionaries."

The proletarian revolution against the bureaucracy is only just beginning. For the first time since the Spanish Revolution of 1936, the working class is creating anew in Hungary its own autonomous mass organs. From its first day, this revolution has taken place at a higher level than previous revolutions. The bureaucratic regime is being combated from the inside, by workers it fraudulently claims to represent, in the name of the genuine and true socialism it so long has prostituted. The hold of bureaucratic organizations over the workers' movement in Western capitalist countries will never recover from the blow it just has suffered.

Our first and foremost task today is to propagate the program of the Hungar-

ian Revolution, to help the French proletariat in its struggle against its own bureaucracy, a struggle that is indissociable from its own struggle against capitalist exploitation.

It is also to work for an all-round regrouping of the workers and the militants who recognize in the Hungarian workers' struggle and program *their* struggle and *their* program.

## Notes

1. See, among the articles published in *S. ou B.*, "L'Ouvrier américain" by Paul Romano (nos. 1-6 [March 1949 to March 1950]); "La Vie en usine" (nos. 11-12, 14-17 [November 1952 to July 1955]); the article "Il faut se débrouiller" (no. 18 [January 1956], pp. 123-27); and numerous articles by Daniel Mothé, now reprinted in *Journal d'un ouvrier* (Paris: Minuit, 1959); also *CS II and III*. [T/E: See the Bibliography for original English version of Romano's article.]

2. See the *Economic Bulletin for Europe*, 8 (August 1956), published by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Our references are to the English edition. All figures given in this publication come from official sources in the countries of Eastern Europe. These countries are represented within the ECE, whose secretariat, directed by the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal, has an attitude that on the whole is fully in sympathy with "planned economies" and has played an important role in the resumption of East-West trade over the past three years.

3. Oskar Lange, "Outline of a Reconversion Plan for the Polish Economy," in *International Economic Papers*, 9 (1957), trans. J. Vanek, pp. 145-55. This article, published in July 1956 in Poland, served as the basis for the economic program worked out by the Seventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish Party that took place in July.

4. Passage cited in full on pp. 256 and 259 of *SB 2*. [T/E: Castoriadis is referring to Gomulka's October 20, 1956, speech to the Polish Central Committee. The *SB 2* article, not translated for the present edition, is "L'Insurrection hongroise: Questions aux militants du PCF" (The Hungarian insurrection: questions to French Communist party militants), published in *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956), and reprinted in *SB 2*, pp. 231-65. This article immediately precedes the present text in this 10/18 volume.]

5. "Outline," pp. 145, 153.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

8. "Khrushchev's Report to the Party Congress—II," in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 8 (March 14, 1956), p. 8.

9. "Khrushchev's Report to the Party Congress—Concluded," in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 8 (March 21, 1956), p. 8.

10. *Report by N. A. Bulganin . . . to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on the Directives of the Sixth Five-Year Plan for the Development of the USSR, 1956-1960*, Soviet News Booklet no. 5 (London, 1956), p. 42.

11. "Speech by L. M. Kaganovich (Kaganovich on Transport, Labor Productivity, Wages)," in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 8 (April 18, 1956), pp. 10-11.

12. "Speech by Comrade N. M. Shvernik (Shvernik: Wages, Working Conditions, Foreign Ties)," in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 8 (May 16, 1956), p. 13. [T/E: We have used the French translation in part here; where the French says "setting norms based on the spirit of camaraderie" the English merely has the cryptic "'campaign-type' revision of norms."]

13. How often, we cannot say. For these ideas to haunt the rulers' principal speeches like an obsession, the real situation they are trying to combat has to have infiltrated into large sectors of production. This is what we are led to think. But for what we are trying to show, the extent of the phenomenon has relatively little importance; its *existence*, irrefutably proven by the official speeches, suffices.

14. Three years ago we wrote: "Another, less apparent relation, is much more important; it is the role played in the slowdown in the race toward war by the proletariat's opposition to exploitation, and in the very first place by the opposition of the Russian proletariat. It is because it was feel-

ing its system of rule cracking under the opposition of the workers that the Russian bureaucracy, with or without Stalin's death, was obliged to grant concessions, which necessarily entailed a lowering of military expenditures and therefore a more conciliatory foreign policy as well. That this opposition never was able to manifest itself in the light of day changes nothing about the matter; the Russian bureaucracy's real or apparent concessions reveal the virulence of this opposition just as the working-class struggles in Czechoslovakia and in Eastern Europe also do, after the fact" (*Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 13 [January-February 1954], p. 1; reprinted in *CMR 1*, p. 376). [T/E: This editorial, "1953 et les luttes ouvrières" (1953 and working-class struggles), is not included in the present translated edition. In a note added to the 10/18 reprint of this editorial, Castoriadis explains that it "marked the group's change of position concerning prospects for a Third World War." He also notes that this editorial was preceded by "The Bureaucracy after the Death of Stalin" (no. 12) and followed by *SIPP* (no. 14) and that the published parts of *DC*, which "inaugurated my break with Marx's economic system and his analysis of the 'contradictions' of the capitalist economy, its crises and its long-term tendencies," appeared in issues 12 and 13.] Of course, "de-Stalinization" is a complex phenomenon, determined by a multitude of factors. If all these factors in the last analysis result from the crisis of a society built upon the radical scission between directors and executives and upon their opposition—therefore, in the long run, from the workers' struggle against the bureaucracy—it remains no less true that this crisis exhibits a variety of different features. Among these, the bureaucracy's inability to regulate *its own structures*, to put the relations between its institutions and its strata in order, is one of the most important. For a deeper examination of the problems of "de-Stalinization" see Claude Lefort's article, "Le Totalitarisme sans Staline—L'URSS dans une nouvelle phase," cited in note 4 of chapter 4, "Khrushchev and the Decomposition of Bureaucratic Ideology."

a) This was an error. It was discussed and corrected in "The Polish Road to Bureaucratization," published two months later. [T/E: The article entitled "La Voie polonaise de la bureaucratization" (*S. ou B.*, 21 [March 1957], pp. 59-76) is reprinted in the 10/18 collection as the following text (*SB 2*, pp. 339-71). It is not included in the present edition.]

## On the Content of Socialism, II

### [Introduction]

The development of modern society and what has happened to the working-class movement over the last 100 years (and in particular since 1917) have compelled us to make a radical revision of the ideas on which that movement has been based.

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

Among the raw materials for such a revision are the vast experience of the Russian Revolution and of its degeneration, the Hungarian workers’ councils, their actions, and their program. But these are far from being the only elements

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*This text opens a discussion on programmatic questions. The positions expressed here do not necessarily express the point of view of the entire Socialisme ou Barbarie group.*” [T/E: This text was originally translated by Maurice Brinton under the title *Workers’ Councils and the Economics of a Self-Managed Society* (London: Solidarity, 1972), with “Our Preface.” It was reprinted by Philadelphia Solidarity in 1974 (with forewords by Philadelphia Solidarity and the League for Economic Democracy) and 1984 as a Wooden Shoe Pamphlet (with a statement about the group, Philadelphia Solidarity, entitled “About Ourselves,” and a new introduction by Peter Dorman, “Workers Councils . . . 25 Years Later”). In editing Brinton’s translation, we have retained the headings he has added to the text, placing them in brackets.]

useful for making such a revision. A look at modern capitalism and at the type of conflict it breeds shows that throughout the world working people are faced with the same fundamental problems, often posed in surprisingly similar terms. These problems call everywhere for the same response. This answer is socialism, a social system that is the very opposite of the bureaucratic capitalism now installed in Russia, China, and elsewhere.

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

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

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

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

In one sense, our revision consists of making more explicit and precise what was the genuine, initial intention of Marxism and what has always been the deepest content of working-class struggles—whether at their dramatic and culminating moments or in the anonymity of working-class life in the factory. In another sense, our revision consists of a freeing of revolutionary thought from the accumulated dross of a century. We want to break the distorting prisms

through which so many revolutionaries have become accustomed to looking at the life and action of the proletariat.

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

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

The first part of this text is devoted to the positive definition of socialism. The following part<sup>1</sup> concerns the analysis of capitalism and the crisis it is undergoing. This order, which might not appear very logical, may be justified by the fact that the Polish and Hungarian revolutions have made the question of the positive definition of the socialist organization of society an immediate practical question.

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

### **The Root of the Crisis of Capitalism**

The capitalist organization of social life (we are speaking about private capitalism in the West and bureaucratic capitalism in the East) creates a perpetually renewed crisis in every sphere of human activity. This crisis appears most intensely in the realm of production—"production" meaning here the shop floor, not "the economy" or "the market." In its essence, however, the situation is the same in all other fields, whether one is dealing with the family, education, international relations, politics, or culture. Everywhere, the capitalist structure of



society consists of organizing people's lives *from the outside*, in the absence of those directly concerned and against their aspirations and interests. This is but another way of saying that capitalism divides society into a narrow stratum of directors (whose function is to decide and organize everything) and the vast majority of the population, who are reduced to carrying out (executing) the decisions made by these directors. As a result of this very fact, most people experience their own lives as something alien to them.

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

If a thousand individuals have among them a given capacity for self-organization, capitalism consists in more or less arbitrarily choosing fifty of these individuals, vesting them with managerial authority and deciding that the others should just be cogs. Metaphorically speaking, this is already a 95 percent loss of social initiative and drive. But there is more to it. As the 950 ignored individuals are *not* cogs, and as capitalism is obliged up to a point to base itself on their human capacities and in fact to develop them, these individuals will react and struggle against what the system imposes upon them. The creative faculties they are not allowed to exercise *on behalf* of a social order that rejects them (and which they reject) are now utilized *against* that social order. A permanent struggle develops at the very heart of social life. It soon becomes the source of further waste. The narrow stratum of directors has henceforth to divide its time between organizing the work of those "below" and seeking to counteract, neutralize, deflect, or manipulate their resistance. The function of the managerial apparatus ceases to be merely organizational and soon assumes all sorts of *coercive* aspects. Those in authority in a large modern factory in fact spend less of their time organizing production than coping, directly or indirectly, with the resistance of the exploited—whether it be a question of supervision, of quality control, of determining piece rates, of "human relations," of discussions with shop stewards or union representatives. On top of all this there is of course the permanent preoccupation of those in power with making sure that everything is measurable, quantifiable, verifiable, and supervisable so as to deal in advance

with any inventive counterreaction the workers might launch against new methods of exploitation. The same applies, with all due corrections, to the total over-all organization of social life and to all the essential activities of any modern state.

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

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

From this angle, too, capitalism can survive only to the extent that reality does not yield to its methods and conform to its spirit. The system functions only to the extent that the “official” organization of production and of society is constantly resisted, thwarted, corrected, and completed by the effective self-organization of people. Work processes can be effective under capitalism only to the extent that the real attitudes of workers toward their work differ from what is prescribed. Working people succeed in learning the general principles pertaining to their work—to which, according to the spirit of the system, they should have no access and concerning which the system seeks to keep them in the dark. They then apply these principles to the specific conditions in which they find themselves, whereas in theory this practical application can be spelled out only by the managerial apparatus.

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

all externally imposed norms, methods, and patterns of organization and the total liberation of the creative and self-organizing capacities of the masses.

### The Principles of Socialist Society

Socialist society implies people's self-organization of every aspect of their social activities. The instauration of socialism therefore entails the immediate abolition of the fundamental division of society into a class of directors and a class of executants.

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

Workers' councils, based on one's place of work, are the *form* of workers' management and the institution capable of fostering its growth. Workers' management means the power of the local workers' councils and ultimately, at the level of society as a whole, the power of the *central assembly of workers' councils* and the *government of the councils*. Factory councils (or councils based on any other place of work such as a plant, building site, mine, railway yard, office, etc.) will be composed of delegates who are elected by the workers, responsible for reporting to them at regular intervals, and revocable by them at any time, and will unite the functions of deliberation, decision, and execution. Such councils are historic creations of the working class. They have come to the forefront every time the question of power has been posed in modern society. The Russian factory committees of 1917, the German workers' councils of 1919, the Hungarian councils of 1956 all sought to express (whatever their name) the same original, organic, and characteristic working-class pattern of self-organization.

To define the socialist organization of society in concrete terms is to draw all the possible conclusions from two basic ideas: workers' management of production and the rule of the councils, which are themselves the organic creations of proletarian struggles. But such a definition can come to life and be given flesh and blood only if combined with an account of how the institutions of this society might function in practice.

There is no question for us here of trying to draw up "statutes," "rules," or an "ideal constitution" for socialist society. Statutes as such mean nothing. The best of statutes can only have meaning to the extent that people are permanently prepared to defend what is best in them, to make up what they lack, and to change whatever they may contain that has become inadequate or outdated. From this point of view, we obviously should condemn any fetishism for the "soviet" or "council" type of organization. The "constant eligibility and revocability of representatives" are of themselves quite insufficient to "guarantee" that a council will remain the expression of working-class interests. The council will remain such an expression for as long as people are prepared to do whatever may be necessary for it to remain so. The realization of socialism is not

a question of better legislation. It depends on the autonomous action of the working class, on this class's capacity to find within itself the necessary awareness of ends and means, the necessary solidarity and determination.

But this autonomous mass action cannot remain amorphous, fragmented, and dispersed. It will find expression in patterns of action and forms of organization: in methods of operation and in institutions that adequately embody and express its purpose. Just as we must avoid the fetishism of "statutes" we should also condemn any sort of "anarchist" or "spontaneist" fetishism that, in the belief that working-class consciousness ultimately will determine everything, takes little or no interest in the forms such consciousness should take if it wants to be effective in changing society. The council is not a *miraculous* institution. It cannot be a means for the workers to express themselves if the workers have not decided that they will express themselves through this medium. But the council is an *adequate* form of organization: Its whole structure is set up to enable this will to self-expression to come to the fore, when it exists. Parliamentary institutions, on the other hand, whether called the "National Assembly," the "U.S. Congress," or the "Supreme Soviet of the USSR,"<sup>2</sup> are by definition types of institutions that cannot be socialist. They are founded on a radical separation between the people, "consulted" from time to time, and those who are supposed to "represent" them, but who are in fact uncontrollable and irremovable. A workers' council is designed so as to represent the masses, but may cease to fulfill this function. Parliament is designed so that it *never* fulfills this function.

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

The "ebbing" of revolutionary activity has nothing inevitable about it. It will always remain a threat, however, given the sheer enormity of the tasks to be accomplished. Everything that adds to the innumerable problems facing popular mass action will enhance the tendency to such a reflux. It is therefore essential that revolutionary society, from its very beginning, furnish itself with a network of institutions and methods of operation that both allow and favor the unfolding of the activity of the masses and that it abolish along the way everything that inhibits or thwarts this activity. It is essential too that revolutionary society should create for itself, at each step, those stable forms of organization that can most readily become effective normal mechanisms for the expression of popular will, both in "important matters" and in everyday life (which is, in truth, the *first and foremost* of all "important matters").

The definition of socialist society that we are attempting therefore requires of us some description of how we visualize its institutions and of the way they will

function. This endeavor is not “utopian,” for it is but the elaboration and extrapolation of the historical creations of the working class, and in particular of the concept of workers’ management.

(At the risk of reinforcing the “utopian” features of this text, we have always used the future tense when speaking of socialist society. The use of the conditional throughout the text would have been tedious and tiresome. It goes without saying that this manner of speaking does not affect in any way our examination of the problems raised here; the reader may easily replace “The socialist society will be . . .” with “The author thinks that the socialist society will be . . .”

As for the substance of the text, we have deliberately reduced historical and literary references to a minimum. The ideas we propose to develop, however, are only the theoretical formulation of the experience of a century of working-class struggles. They embody real experiences (both positive and negative), conclusions (both direct and indirect) that have already been drawn, answers given to problems actually posed or answers that would have had to be given if such and such a revolution had developed a little further. Thus every sentence in this text is linked to questions that have already been met implicitly or explicitly in the course of working-class struggles. This should put a stop once and for all to allegations of “utopianism.”

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

*[Institutions That People Can Understand and Control]*

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

Modern society is a dark and hidden jungle, a confusion of apparatuses, structures, and institutions whose workings no one, or almost no one, understands, and no one really dominates or takes any interest in. Socialist society will be possible only if it brings about a radical change in this state of affairs and massively simplifies social organization. Socialism implies that the *organization* of a society will have become transparent to its members.

To say that the workings and institutions of socialist society must be easy to understand implies that people must have a maximum of information. This “maximum of information” is something quite different from an enormous mass of data. The problem is not to equip everybody with a portable version of the Bibliothèque nationale or the Library of Congress. On the contrary, the *maximum of information* depends first and foremost on a *reduction of data to their*

*essentials* so that they can readily be handled by everyone. This will be possible because socialism will result in an immediate and enormous simplification of problems and the disappearance, pure and simple, of most current rules and regulations, which will have become quite meaningless. It will be facilitated by a systematic effort to gather and disseminate information [*connaissance*] about social reality, and to *present* facts both adequately and simply. Further on, when discussing the functioning of socialist economy, we will give examples of the enormous possibilities that already exist in this field.

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

“In full knowledge of the relevant facts”: In these few words lies the whole problem of democracy.<sup>3</sup> It is meaningless to ask people to voice their opinions if they are not aware of the relevant facts. This has long been stressed by the reactionary or fascist critics of bourgeois “democracy,” and even by the most cynical Stalinist.<sup>4</sup> It is obvious that bourgeois democracy is a farce, if only because literally *nobody* in capitalist society can express an opinion in knowledge of the relevant facts, least of all the mass of the people from whom political and economic realities and the real meaning of the questions asked are systematically hidden. But the answer is not to vest power in the hands of a few incompetent and uncontrollable bureaucrats. The answer is to transform social reality in such a way that essential data and fundamental problems are understood by everyone, enabling everyone to express opinions in full knowledge of the relevant facts.

#### [*Direct Democracy and Centralization*]

To decide means to decide for oneself. To decide who is to decide already is not quite deciding for oneself. The only total form of democracy is therefore *direct democracy*. And the factory council exercises authority and replaces the factory’s general assembly only when the latter is not in session.<sup>5</sup>

To achieve the widest, the most meaningful direct democracy will require that all the economic, political, and other structures of society be based on local groups that are concrete collectivities, organic social units. Direct democracy certainly requires the physical presence of citizens in a given place, when decisions have to be made. But this is not enough. It also requires that these citizens form an organic community, that they live if possible in the same milieu, that they be familiar through their daily experience with the subject to be discussed

and with the problems to be tackled. It is only in such units that the political participation of individuals can become total, that people can know and feel that their involvement will have an effect, and that the real life of the community is, in large part, determined by its own members and not by unknown or external authorities who decide for them. There must therefore be the maximum amount of autonomy and self-administration for the local units.

Modern social life has already created these collectivities and continues to create them. They are based on medium-sized or large enterprises and are to be found in industry, transportation, commerce, banking, insurance, public administration, where people by the hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands spend the main part of their life harnessed to a common task, where they encounter society in its most concrete form. A place of work is not only a unit of production: It has become the primary unit of social life for the vast majority of people.<sup>6</sup> Instead of basing itself on geographical units, which economic developments have rendered completely artificial, the political structure of socialism will be largely based on collectivities involved in common work. Such collectivities will be the fertile soil on which direct democracy can flourish, as the ancient city or the democratic communities of free farmers in the United States of the nineteenth century were in their times, and for similar reasons.

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

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

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

tension of the power of grass-roots or factory organs, neglecting what is happening at the center.

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

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

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

*[The Flow of Information and Decisions]*

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



relating to his immediate milieu. The system seeks to avoid, or at any rate it does not encourage, such “accidents.”

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

We must stress once again that we are not trying to draw up perfect blueprints. It is obvious, for instance, that to collect and disseminate information is not a socially neutral function. Not all information can be disseminated—that would be the surest way of smothering what is relevant and rendering it incomprehensible and therefore uncontrollable. The role of the government is therefore *political*, even in this respect. This is why we call it “government” and not the “central press service.” But more important is its explicit function of informing people, which shall be its responsibility. The explicit function of government today is to *hide* what’s going on from the people.

### Socialism Is the Transformation of Work

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

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

A purely political autonomy would be meaningless. One cannot imagine a society where people would be slaves in production every day of the week and then enjoy Sundays of political freedom. (Yet this is what Lenin’s definition of socialism as “soviets plus electrification” boiled down to.) The idea that socialist production or a socialist economy could be run, at any political level, by “technicians” supervised by councils, or by soviets or by any other body “incarnating

the political power of the working class” is pure nonsense. *Real* power in any such society would rapidly fall into the hands of those who managed production. The councils or soviets sooner or later would wither away amid the general indifference of the population. People would stop devoting time, interest, or activity to institutions that no longer really determined the pattern of their lives.

Autonomy is therefore meaningless unless it implies *workers' management*, that is, unless it involves organized workers determining the production process themselves at the level of the shop, the plant, entire industries, and the economy as a whole. But workers' management is not just a new administrative technique. It cannot remain external to the structure of work itself. It does not mean keeping work as it is and just replacing the bureaucratic apparatus that currently manages production with a workers' council—however democratic or revocable such a council might be. It means that for the mass of workers new relations will have to be instaurated with their work and about their work. The very *content* of work will immediately have to be altered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is no capitalist chemistry or capitalist physics as such. There is not even a specifically capitalist “technique,” in the general sense of the word. There certainly is, however, a capitalist *technology*, if by this one means that of the “spectrum” of techniques available at a given point in time (as determined by the development of science) a given group (or “band”) of processes actually will be selected. From the moment the development of science permits a choice of several possible procedures, a society will regularly choose those methods that have a meaning for it, that are “rational” within the framework of its own class rationality. But the “rationality” of an exploiting society is not the rationality of socialism. The conscious transformation of technology will therefore be a central task of a society of free workers. Correspondingly, the analysis of alienation and crisis in capitalist society ought to begin with this central core of all social relationships, which are found in the concrete relationships of production, people's relationships in work, as seen in its three indissociable aspects: the relationship

of the workers with the means and objects of production, the relationships of the workers among themselves, and the relationship of the workers with the managerial apparatus of the production process.

(Academic economists have analyzed the fact that of several technically feasible possibilities certain ones are chosen, and that these choices lead to a particular pattern of technology applied in real life, giving concrete expression to the technique [understood in the general sense of “know-how”] of a given period. See, for instance, Joan Robinson’s *The Accumulation of Capital*, 3rd ed. [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1969], pp. 101-78. But in these analyses the choice is always presented as flowing from considerations of “profitability” and in particular from the “relative costs of capital and labor.” This abstract viewpoint has little grasp of the reality of industrial evolution. Marx, on the other hand, underlines the *social* content of machine-dominated industry, its enslaving function.)

Marx, as is well known, was the first to go beyond the surface of the economic phenomena of capitalism (such as the market, competition, distribution, etc.) and to tackle the analysis of the central area of capitalist social relations: the concrete relations of production in the capitalist factory. But volume 1 of *Capital* is still awaiting its sequel. The most striking feature of the degeneration of the Marxist movement is that this particular concern of Marx’s, the most fundamental of all, was soon abandoned, even by the best of Marxists, in favor of an analysis of “important” phenomena. Through this very fact, these analyses were either totally distorted, or ended up dealing with very partial aspects of reality, thereby leading to judgments that proved catastrophically wrong.<sup>7</sup>

Thus it is striking to see Rosa Luxemburg entitle two large volumes *The Accumulation of Capital*, in which she totally ignores what this process of accumulation really signifies in the concrete relations of production. Her concern in these volumes was solely with the possibility of an overall equilibrium between production and consumption, and she finally came to believe that she had discovered in capitalism a process of automatic collapse (an idea, needless to say, that is concretely false and a priori absurd).

It is just as striking to see Lenin, in his *Imperialism*, start from the correct and fundamental observation that the concentration of capital has reached the stage of domination by monopolies—and yet neglect the transformation in the capitalist factory’s relations of production that results precisely from such concentration. At the same time, he ignored the crucial phenomenon of the constitution of an enormous apparatus managing production, which was henceforth to incarnate exploitation. He preferred to see the main consequences of the concentration of capital in the transformation of capitalists into “coupon-clipping” rentiers. The working-class movement is still paying the consequences of this way of looking at things. Insofar as ideas play a role in history, Khrushchev is in power in Russia as a by-product of the conception that exploitation can only take the form of coupon clipping.

But we must go back even further. We must go back to Marx himself. Marx shed a great deal of light on the alienation the producer experiences in the course

of the capitalist production process and on the enslavement of man by the mechanical universe he has created. But Marx's analysis is at times incomplete in that he sees *only* alienation in all this. In *Capital*—as opposed to Marx's early writings—it is hardly brought out at all that the worker is (and can only *be*) the *positive* vehicle of capitalist production, which is obliged to base itself on him *as such*, and to *develop* him *as such*, while simultaneously seeking to reduce him to an automaton and, at the limit, to drive him out of production altogether. Because of this, the analysis fails to perceive that the primary crisis of capitalism is the crisis at the point of production, due to the simultaneous existence of two contradictory tendencies, neither of which could disappear without the whole system collapsing. Marx shows in capitalism “despotism in the workshop and anarchy in society”—instead of seeing it as *both* despotism *and* anarchy in *both* workshop *and* society. This leads him to look for the crisis of capitalism not in production itself (except insofar as capitalist production develops “oppression, misery, degradation, but also revolt,” and the numerical strength and discipline of the proletariat), but in such factors as overproduction and the falling rate of profit. Marx therefore fails to see that as long as *this type of work* persists, this crisis will persist with all it entails, and this not only whatever the system of property but also whatever the nature of the State, and finally whatever even the system of *management* of production.

In certain passages of *Capital*, Marx is thus led to see in modern production *only* the fact that the producer is mutilated and reduced to a “fragment of a man”—which is true, *as much as the contrary*—and, what is more serious, to link this aspect to modern production and finally to *production as such*, instead of linking it to *capitalist technology*. Marx implies that the basis of this state of affairs is modern production as such, a stage in the development of technique about which nothing can be done, the famous “realm of necessity.” Thus the takeover of society by the producers—socialism—at times comes to mean for Marx only an external change in political and economic *management*, a change that would leave intact the structure of work and simply reform its more “inhuman” aspects. This idea is clearly expressed in the famous passage of volume 3 of *Capital*, where Marx, speaking of socialist society, says,

In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. . . . Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it . . . and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins . . . the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite.<sup>8</sup>

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

The reduction of the working day is in fact important, not for this reason however, but because it will allow people to achieve a balance between their various types of activity. And, at the limit, the “ideal” (communism) is not the reduction of the working day to zero, but the free determination by each of the nature and extent of his work. Socialist society will be able to reduce the length of the working day, and will have to do so, but this will not be its fundamental preoccupation. Its first task will be to tackle “the realm of necessity” *as such*, to transform the very nature of work. The problem is not to leave more and more “free” time to individuals—which might well only be *empty* time—so that they may fill it at will with “poetry” or the carving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to embody itself in creative activity. The problem is to put poetry into work. (Strictly speaking, poetry means creation.) Production is not something negative that has to be limited as much as possible for mankind to fulfill itself in its leisure. The instauration of autonomy is also—and in the first place—the instauration of autonomy in work.

Underlying the idea that freedom is to be found “outside the sphere of actual material production” there lies a double error: first, that the very nature of technique and of modern production renders inevitable the domination of the productive process over the producer, in the course of his work; second, that technique and in particular modern technique follows an autonomous development, before which one can only bow down. Modern technique would moreover possess the double attribute of, on the one hand, constantly reducing the human role in production and, on the other hand, of constantly increasing the productivity of labor. From these two inexplicably combined attributes would result a miraculous dialectic of technical progress: More and more a slave *in the course of* work, man would be in a position to reduce enormously the *length* of work, if only he could succeed in organizing society rationally.

We have already shown, however, that there is not an autonomous development of technique in its application to the production process, i.e., of technology. Of the sum total of technologies that scientific and technical development makes possible at any given point in time, capitalist society brings to fulfillment those ones that correspond most closely to its class structure and that best permit capital to struggle against labor. It is generally believed that the application of this or that invention to production depends on its economic profitability. But

there is no such thing as a neutral “profitability”: The class struggle in the factory is the main factor determining “profitability.” A given invention will be preferred to another by a factory management if, other things being equal, it enhances the “independent” progress of production, freeing it from interference by the producers. The increasing enslavement of people in production flows essentially from *this* process, and not from some mysterious curse, inherent in a given phase of technological development. There is, moreover, no magic dialectic of slavery and productivity: Productivity increases as a function of the enormous scientific and technical advancements that are at the basis of modern production—and it increases *despite* the slavery, and not because of it. Slavery implies an *enormous* amount of waste, due to the fact that people only contribute to production an infinitesimal fraction of their potential abilities. (We are passing no a priori judgment on what these faculties might be. However low they may estimate these faculties, Mr. Dreyfus<sup>a</sup> and Mr. Khrushchev would have to admit that their own particular ways of organizing production only tap an infinitesimal fraction of their potential.)

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

### Workers' Management: The Factory

#### [Functions]

It is well known that workers can organize their own work at the level of a workshop or of part of a factory. Bourgeois industrial sociologists not only recognize this fact but point out that “primary groups” of workers often get on with their job better if management leaves them alone and doesn’t constantly try to “direct” them.<sup>9</sup>

How can the work of these various “primary groups”—or of various shops and sections—be coordinated? Bourgeois theoreticians stress that the present managerial apparatus, whose formal job it is to ensure such coordination, is not really up to the task: It has no real grip on the workers and is itself torn by internal conflicts. But, having “demolished” the present setup by their criticisms, these modern industrial sociologists have nothing to put in its place. And as beyond the “primary” organization of production there has to be a “secondary” organization, they finally fall back on the existing bureaucratic apparatus, exhorting it “to understand,” “to improve itself,” “to trust people more,” etc.<sup>10</sup> The same can be said, at another level, of “democratically reformed” or “de-Stalinized” Russian leaders.<sup>11</sup>

What no one seems prepared to recognize (or even to admit) is the capacity of working people to manage their own affairs outside a very narrow radius. The bureaucratic mind cannot see in the mass of workers employed in a factory or an office an active subject, capable of managing and organizing. In the eyes of those



in authority, both East and West, as soon as one gets beyond a group of ten, fifteen, or twenty individuals the crowd begins—the mob, the thousand-headed Hydra that cannot act collectively, or that could only act collectively in the display of collective delirium or hysteria. They believe that only a managerial apparatus specifically designed for this purpose, and endowed of course with coercive functions, can master and “organize” this mass.

The inconsistencies and shortcomings of the present managerial apparatus are such that even today individual workers or “primary groups” are obliged to take on quite a number of coordinating tasks.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, historical experience shows that the working class is quite capable of managing whole enterprises. In Spain, in 1936 and 1937, workers ran the factories. In Budapest, in 1956, according to the accounts of Hungarian refugees, big bakeries employing hundreds of workers carried on during and immediately after the insurrection. They worked better than ever before, under workers’ self-management. Many such examples could be cited.

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

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

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

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

The capitalist structure of the factory generally results in considerable overstaffing of these areas,<sup>13</sup> and a socialist reorganization probably will result in a substantial savings of labor in these fields. Some of these departments will not only diminish in size, but will witness a radical transformation of their functions. In the last few years, “commercial services” have everywhere grown enormously. In a planned socialist economy, they will be concerned mainly with the bookkeeping aspects of obtaining supplies and making deliveries. They will be in contact with similar departments in supply factories and with stores that sell to consumers. Once the necessary transformations have been brought about, offices will be considered “workshops” like all others, organizing their own work

and keeping in contact with other shops for purposes of coordination. They will enjoy no particular rights by virtue of the nature of their work. They have, in fact, no such rights today, and it is as a result of other factors (the division between manual and “intellectual” labor, the more pronounced hierarchy found in offices) that individuals heading up these departments sometimes can rise to the summit of the genuine “management” of the company.

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

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

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

Will such cooperation work smoothly? There is no intrinsic reason why insurmountable obstacles should arise. The workers will have no interest in challenging an answer that the technician, in his capacity as a technician, may give to purely technical problems. And if there are disagreements, these will rapidly be resolved in practice. The field of production allows for almost immediate verification of what this or that person proposes. That for this or that part or tool, a certain type of metallic compound would be preferable (given a certain state of knowledge and certain conditions of production) cannot and will not be a matter of controversy.

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

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

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

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

What would be the strength and probable evolution of such a tendency? We cannot discuss this problem in any depth. We can only reemphasize that technicians do not constitute a majority—or even an essential part—of the upper strata of modern economic or political management. Incidentally, to become aware of this obvious fact helps one see through the mystificatory character of all those arguments that seek to prove that ordinary people cannot manage production because they lack the "necessary technical capacity." The vast majority of technicians only occupy subordinate positions. They only carry out compartmentalized work, on instructions from above. Those technicians who have "reached the top" are not there as *technicians*, but as "managers" or "organizers."

Modern capitalism is *bureaucratic* capitalism. It is not—and never will be—a *technocratic* capitalism. The concept of a technocracy is an empty generalization of superficial sociologists, or a daydream of technicians confronted with their

own impotence and with the absurdity of the present system. Technicians do not constitute a separate class. From the formal point of view they are just a category of salaried workers. The evolution of modern capitalism, by increasing their numbers and by transforming them into people who carry out compartmentalized and interchangeable labor, tends to drive them closer to the working class. Counteracting these tendencies, it is true, is their position in the wage and status hierarchies—and also the scanty chances for “moving up” still open to them. But these channels are gradually being closed as the numbers of technicians increases and as bureaucratization spreads within its own ranks. In parallel with all this, a kind of revolt is developing among these compartmentalized and bureaucratized [*fonctionnarisé*] technicians as they confront the irrationalities of the system of bureaucratic capitalism and increasingly experience difficulties in giving free rein to their capacities for creative or meaningful work.

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

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

**4. [*Truly managerial functions.*]** The people “consulted” by a company chairman or managing director before he makes an important decision usually number less than a dozen, even in the largest of firms. This very narrow stratum of management has two main tasks. On the one hand, it has to make decisions concerning investment, stocks, output, etc., in relation to market fluctuations and long-term prospects. On the other hand, it has to “coordinate” the various differences between various segments of the bureaucratic apparatus.

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

#### [*Institutions*]

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

- a) *The factory council*, composed of delegates from the various shops and of-

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

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

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

### **[The Content of Workers' Management at Factory Level]**

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

#### *[Immediate Content]*

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

Seen from this angle, workers' management implies that the workers' collective itself will bear the final responsibility for deciding *how* a proposed target could best be achieved, given the general means available. The task corresponds

to the “positive” functions of the present narrowly based managerial apparatus, which itself will have been superseded. The workers themselves will determine the organization of their work in each shop or department. They will ensure co-ordination between shops. This will take place through direct contacts whenever it is a question of routine problems or of shops engaged in closely related aspects of the production process. If more important matters arose, they would be discussed and solved by meetings of delegates (or by joint gatherings of workers) of two or more shops or sections. The overall coordination of the work would be undertaken by the factory council and by the general assembly of the factory. Relations with the rest of the economy, as already stated, would be in the hands of the factory council.

Under such conditions, *autonomy* in the production process means the ability to decide how to achieve designated targets with the aid of means that have been defined in general terms. A certain “give-and-take” undoubtedly will occur between the “targets set” and “means to be used.” The plan must in general prescribe these “targets” and “means,” for they are the product of other factories. But only the workers of the particular factory can carry out this process of concrete elaboration. By themselves, “targets set” and “means of production available for achieving them” do not automatically or exhaustively define all the possible methods that could be used, all the more so since the plan’s definition of the means remains highly general and it cannot specify even all the important “details.” Spelling these methods out in detail and deciding exactly how an objective will be achieved with the means provided will be the first area in which workers will exercise their autonomy. It is an important field but a *limited* one, and it is essential to be fully aware of its limitations. These limitations stem from (and define) the inevitable framework within which this new type of production will have to *begin*. It will be the task of socialist production to constantly expand this framework and to constantly push back these limitations on autonomy.

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

Autonomy also is limited in relation to available material *means*. The workers of a given enterprise cannot in full autonomy determine the means of production they would prefer to use, for these are but the products of other enterprises or factories. Total autonomy for every factory, in relation to means, would imply that each factory could determine the output of all the others. These various autonomies would immediately cancel each other out. This limitation is, however, less rigid than the first (the limitation in relation to targets). Alterations of its own equipment, as proposed by the user factory, could easily be accommodated by the producer factory without the latter saddling itself with a heavy extra load.

On a small scale, this happens even today in integrated engineering factories (car factories, for instance), where a substantial part of the tooling utilized in one shop may be made in another shop of the same factory. Close cooperation between plants making machine tools and plants using them could quickly lead to considerable changes in the means of production currently used.<sup>14</sup>

*[Subsequent Possibilities]*

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

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

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

tatives (or wider conferences of producers) organized both horizontally and vertically.

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

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

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

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

The division between producers and consumers appears most glaringly in relation to the *quality* of goods. This problem is insoluble in any exploiting society as Daniel Mothé’s dialogue between the human-worker and the robot-worker shows: “Do you think this part’s important?—What’s it to you? You can always jam it in somehow.”<sup>15</sup> Those who look only at the surface of things see only a commodity as a commodity. They don’t see in it a crystallized moment of the class struggle. They see faults or defects, instead of seeing in them the resultant of the worker’s constant struggle with himself. Faults or defects embody the worker’s struggles against exploitation. They also embody squabbles between different sections of the bureaucracy managing the plant.

The elimination of exploitation will of itself bring about a change in all this. At work, people will begin to assert their claims as future consumers of what they are producing. In its early phases, however, socialist society will undoubt-



edly have to instaurate regular forms of contact (other than “the market”) between producers and consumers.

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

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

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

### **Simplification and Rationalization of General Economic Problems**

#### *[Simplification and Rationalization of Data]*

The functioning of the socialist economy implies that the producers themselves will consciously manage all economic activity. This management will be exercised at all levels, and in particular at the overall or central level. It is completely illusory to believe that either a central bureaucracy left to itself or even a bureaucracy “controlled” by the workers could guide the economy toward socialism. Such a bureaucracy could only lead society toward new forms of exploitation. It is also wrong to think that “automatic” objective mechanisms could be established that, like the automatic pilot of a modern jet airplane, could at each mo-

ment direct the economy in the desired direction. It is just as impossible for an “enlightened” bureaucracy, the mechanisms of a “true market” (supposedly restored to its pristine and original, precapitalist, purity), or the regulatory control afforded by some electronic supercomputer to achieve such an ideal end. Any plan presupposes a fundamental decision on the rate of growth of the economy, and this in turn depends essentially on decisions concerning the distribution of the social product between investment and consumption.

(One might add that the rate of economic growth also depends: [1] on *technical progress* [but such technical progress is itself critically dependent on the amounts of investment put, directly or indirectly, into research]; and [2] on the evolution of the *labor productivity* [but this hinges on the amount of capital invested per worker and on the level of technique—and these two factors again bring us back to the larger question of investment. More significantly, the productivity of labor depends on the producers’ attitude toward the economy. This, in turn, would center on people’s attitude toward the plan, on how its targets were established, on their own involvement and sense of identification with the decisions reached, and in general on factors discussed in this text].)

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

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

A condensation of this type is *possible*, first, because there is at least a rational outline to the economy; second, because there already exist today certain techniques allowing one to grasp the complexities of economic reality; and finally,

because it is now possible to mechanize and to automate all that does not pertain to human decisions in the strict sense.

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

[The "Plan Factory"]

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

When passing from simple initial conditions to a simple ultimate target, the intermediate targets can be determined right away. As the initial conditions or the ultimate targets (or both) become more complex, or are more spread out in time, the establishment of intermediate targets becomes more difficult. In the case of the economy as a whole (where there are thousands of different products, many of which can be made by several different processes, and where the manufacture of any given category of products directly or indirectly involves most of the others), one might imagine that the level of complexity makes rational planning (in the sense of an a priori determination of the intermediate targets, given the initial conditions and ultimate target) impossible. The apologists for "free enterprise" have been proclaiming this doctrine for ages. But it is false.<sup>16</sup> The problem can be solved and available mathematical techniques in fact allow it to be solved remarkably simply. Once the initial conditions (the economic situation at the start of the planning process) are known and the ultimate target or targets have been consciously set, all planning work (the determination of the intermediate targets) can be reduced to a purely technical task of execution, capable of being mechanized and automated to a very high degree.

The basis of the new methods is the concept of the total interdependence of all sectors of the economy (the fact that everything that one sector utilizes in production is itself the product of one or more other sectors; and the converse fact that every product of a given sector will ultimately be utilized or consumed by one or more other sectors). The idea, which goes back to Quesnay and which formed the basis of Marx's theory of accumulation, has been vastly developed in the past twenty years by a group of American economists around W. Leontief

that has succeeded in giving it a statistical formulation that can be applied to a real economy in a state of constant expansion.<sup>17</sup> This interdependence is such that at any given moment (for a given level of technique and a given structure of available equipment) the production of each sector is related, in a relatively stable manner, to the products of other sectors that the first sector utilizes (or: “consumes productively”).

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

One could stop at this point if one were only dealing with a single enterprise. Every firm bases itself on calculations of this sort (in fact, on much more detailed ones) whenever, in making decisions about how much to produce or how much to increase production, it buys raw materials, orders machinery or recruits labor. But when one looks at the economy as a whole, things change. The interdependence of the various sectors has definite consequences. The *increase* of production in a given sector has repercussions (of varying intensity) on all other sectors and finally on the initial sector itself. For example, an increase in the production of steel immediately requires an increase in the production of coal. But this requires both an increase in certain types of mining equipment and the recruitment of more labor into mining. The increased demand for mining equipment in turn requires *more* steel, and more labor in the steel mills. This in turn leads to a demand for still more coal, etc., etc. For their part, newly hired workers get increased wages, and therefore they buy more consumer goods of various kinds. The production of these new goods will require such and such an amount of raw materials, new equipment, etc. (and, again, more coal and steel). The question of how much the demand for nylon stockings will rise in West Virginia or the Basses-Pyrénées if a new blast furnace were to be built in Pennsylvania or the Lorraine is not a joke but one of the central problems to which planners should—and can—respond.

The use of Leontief’s matrices, combined with other modern methods such as Koopman’s “activity analysis”<sup>18</sup> (of which “operational research” is a specific instance) would, in the case of a socialist economy, allow theoretically exact answers to be given to questions of this type. A matrix is a table on which the technical coefficients (both “current technical coefficients” and “technical coeffi-

cients of capital”) expressing the dependence of each sector upon each of the others are laid out systematically. Every ultimate target that might be chosen is presented as a list of material means to be utilized (and therefore manufactured) in specific amounts, within the period in question. As soon as the ultimate target is chosen, the solution of a system of simultaneous equations enables one to define immediately all the intermediate targets and therefore the tasks to be fulfilled by each sector of the economy.

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

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

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

Two departments of the plan factory warrant special mention: the one dealing with stock taking and the one dealing with the technical coefficients.

The quality of the planning work, when conceived in this way, depends on how much people know about the *real* state of the economy, since such knowledge forms the basis of all planning work. An accurate solution, in other words, depends on adequate information both about the “initial conditions” and the “technical coefficients.” Industrial and agricultural censuses are carried out at regular intervals, even today, by a number of advanced capitalist countries, but they offer only a very crude basis because they are extremely inaccurate, fragmented, and based on insufficient data. The taking of an up-to-date and complete inventory will be the first task, once the workers take power, and it will require a great deal of serious preparation. It cannot be achieved “by decree,” from one day to the next. Nor, once taken, could such an inventory be considered final. Perfecting it and keeping it up-to-date will be an ongoing task of the plan factory, working in close cooperation with the departments responsible for industrial stock taking in their own enterprises. The results of this cooperation

will constantly modify and “enrich” the “memory” of the central computer (which indeed will itself take on a large part of the job).

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

Such in-depth knowledge of the real state of affairs of the economy, combined with the constant revision of basic physical and technical data and with the possibility of drawing *instantaneous* conclusions from them, will result in very considerable, probably enormous gains, though it is difficult at this time to form a precise idea of the extent of these changes. The potentialities of these new computer-assisted techniques have been exploited in particular instances to make considerable improvements upon past practices, thus leading to greater rationality and economic savings. But these potentialities remain untapped in the very area where they could be most usefully applied: that of the economy taken as a whole. Any technical modification, in any sector, could in principle affect the conditions for profitability and the rational choice of production methods in all other sectors. A socialist economy will be able *totally* and *instantaneously* to take advantage of such facts. Capitalist economies take them into account only belatedly and in a very partial way.

It will be immediately possible to actually set up such a plan factory in any moderately industrialized country. The necessary equipment already exists. So do the people capable of operating it. Banks and insurance companies (which will be unnecessary under socialism) already use some of these methods in work of this general type. Linking up with mathematicians, statisticians, and econometricians, those who work in such offices could provide the initial personnel of the plan factory. Workers’ management of production and the requirements of a rational economy will provide a tremendous impetus to the simultaneously “spontaneous/automatic” and “conscious” development of the logical and mechanical aspects of rational planning techniques.

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

In none of these instances would those actually working in the plan factory

decide anything—except, like in every other factory, the organization of their own work.

### *The Market for Consumer Goods*

With a fixed set of techniques, the determination of intermediate targets is, as we have just seen, a purely mechanical matter. With constantly and permanently evolving techniques, other problems arise that we will treat later. But what about consumption? In a socialist society, how could people determine what and how much is to be produced?

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

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

Once the overall volume of consumption is defined, one might be tempted to treat its constituent articles of consumption as “intermediate targets.” One might say, “When consumers dispose of  $x$  amount of income, they will buy  $y$  amount of some particular article.” But this would be an artificial and ultimately erroneous response.

In relation to human consumption, deciding on living standards does not involve the same kind of considerations that go into determining how many tons of coal are needed to produce so many tons of steel. There are no “technical coefficients of the consumer.” In actual, material production, such coefficients have an intrinsic meaning, but in the realm of consumption they would represent merely a bookkeeping contrivance. Under capitalism, there is of course some statistical correlation between income and the structure of demand (without such a correlation private capitalism could not function). But this is only a very relative affair. It would be turned upside down under socialism. A massive redistribution of incomes will have taken place; many profound changes will have occurred in every realm of life; the permanent rape of consumers through advertising and capitalist sales techniques will have been abolished; and new tastes will have emerged as the result of an increase in free time.

Finally, the statistical regularity of consumer demand cannot solve the problem of *gaps* that might appear within a given period between real demand and that envisaged in the plan. Genuine planning does not mean saying, "Living standards will go up by 5 percent next year, and experience tells us that this will result in a 20 percent increase in the demand for cars, so let's make 20 percent more cars," and stopping at that. One will have to start this way, where other criteria are missing, but there will have to be powerful correcting mechanisms capable of responding to disparities between anticipated and real demand.

Socialist society will have to regulate the pattern of its consumption according to the principle of *consumer sovereignty*, which implies the existence of a real market for consumer goods. The "general decision" embodied in the plan will define: (1) what proportion of its overall product society wishes to devote to the satisfaction of individual consumer needs, (2) what proportion it would like to allocate to collective needs ("public consumption"), and (3) what proportion it wants to apply to the development of the productive forces (i.e., investment). But the *structure* of consumption will have to be determined by the demand of consumers themselves.

How would this market operate? How could a mutual adaptation of supply and demand come about?

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

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

1. Available stocks will either rise or fall.
2. According to whether the reserve stocks decreased or increased (i.e., according to whether demand had been initially underestimated or overestimated), there will be an initial rise or fall in the price of the various commodities. The reason for these temporary price fluctuations will have to be fully explained to the public.
3. Meanwhile, there will be an immediate readjustment in the structure for producing consumer goods to the level where (the stocks having been replenished) the production of goods equals the demand. At that moment, the sale price would again become equal to the "normal price" of the product.

Given the principle of consumer sovereignty, any differences between actual



demand and the amount of production scheduled will have to be corrected by a modification in the structure of production and not by resorting to the instauration of permanent differences between selling prices and normal prices. If such differences were to appear, they would imply ipso facto that the original planning decision was wrong, in this particular field.

### *Money, Prices, Wages, and Value*

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

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

(Labor value includes, of course, the *actual* social cost of the equipment utilized in the period considered. [For the working out of labor values by the matrix method, see the article *DC in S. ou B.*, 12 (August 1953), pp. 7-22.] The adoption of labor value as a yardstick is equivalent to what academic economists call “normal long-term costs.” The viewpoint expressed in this text corresponds to Marx’s, which is, in general, attacked by academic economists, even “socialist” ones. For them, “marginal costs” should determine prices; see, for instance, Joan Robinson’s *An Essay on Marxian Economics*, 2nd ed. [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966], pp. 23-28. We cannot go into this discussion here. All we can say is that the application of the principle of marginal costs would mean that the price of a plane ticket between Paris and New York would at times be zero and at other times equivalent to that of the whole aircraft.)

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

It would both simplify and clarify things if the monetary unit was considered the “net product of an hour of labor” and if this were made the unit of value. It

also would be helpful if the hourly wage, equal for all, were a given fraction of this unit, expressing the ratio

$$\frac{\text{private consumption}}{\text{total net production}} .$$

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

### *Absolute Wage Equality*

Whenever they succeed in expressing themselves independently of the trade-union bureaucracy, working-class aspirations and demands increasingly are directed against hierarchy and wage differentials.<sup>19</sup> Basing itself on this fact, socialist society will introduce absolute equality in the area of wages.

There is no justification, other than naked exploitation, for wage differentials,<sup>20</sup> whether these reflect differing professional qualifications or differences in productivity. If an individual himself advanced the costs of his professional training and if society considered him "an enterprise," the recuperation of those costs, spread out over a working lifetime would at most "justify," at the extremes of the wage spectrum, a differential of 2:1 (between sweeper and neurosurgeon). Under socialism, training costs will be advanced by society (they often are, even today), and the question of their "recovery" will not arise. As for productivity, it depends (already today) much less on bonuses and incentives and much more on the coercions exercised, on the one hand, by machines and supervisors and, on the other hand, by the discipline of production, imposed by primary working groups in the workshop. Socialist society could not increase productivity by economic constraints without resorting again to all the capitalist paraphernalia of norms, supervision, etc. Labor discipline will flow (as it already does, in part, today) from the self-organization of primary groups in each workshop, from the mutual cooperation and supervision among the factories' different shops, from gatherings of producers in different factories or different sectors of the economy. As a general rule, the primary group in a workshop ensures the discipline of any particular individual. Anyone who proves incorrigible can be made to leave that particular shop. It would then be up to this recalcitrant individual to seek entry into another primary group of workers and to get accepted by them or else to remain jobless.

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

one earns. A few years of wage equality and little will be left of the present-day mentality of individuals.

### *The Fundamental Decision*

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

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

Socialist society will also be the first society capable of rationally deciding how society’s product should be divided between consumption and investment. (We leave aside for now the problem of public consumption.) Under private capitalism, this distribution takes place in an absolutely blind fashion and one would seek in vain any “rationality” underlying what determines investment. (In his major work, which is devoted to this theme—and after a moderate use of differential equations—Keynes comes up with the conclusion that the main determinants of investment are the “animal spirits” of entrepreneurs. *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* [1936], pp. 161-62.) The idea that the volume of investment is primarily determined by the rate of interest (and that the latter results from the interplay of the “real forces of productivity and thrift”) was long ago demolished by academic economists themselves. (See, for example, Joan Robinson’s *The Rate of Interest and Other Essays* [1952; reprinted, London: Hyperion, 1981].) In bureaucratic capitalist societies, the volume of investment is also decided quite arbitrarily, and the central bureaucracy in these societies has never been able to justify its choices except through monotonous recitations of litanies about the “priority of heavy industry.” (One would seek in vain through the voluminous writings of Mr. Charles Bettelheim for any attempt to justify the rate of accumulation “chosen” by the Russian bureaucracy. The “socialism” of such “theoreticians” not only implies that Stalin [or Khrushchev] alone can know. It also implies that such knowledge, by its very nature, cannot be communicated to the rest of humanity. In another country, and in other times, this was known as the *Führerprinzip*.) Even if there were a rational, “objective” basis for making a central decision on this matter, the decision arrived at would be ipso facto irrational if it was reached in the absence of those primarily concerned, namely, the members of society. Any decision made in this

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

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

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

(This net increase in the social product of which we have spoken obviously is not just the sum of the increases in each sector. Several elements must be added up or be subtracted before one can pass from one to the other. For instance, there would be the "intermediate utilizations" of the products of each sector and the "external economies" [investment in a given sector, by abolishing a bottleneck, could allow the better use of the productive capacities of other sectors that, although already established, were being wasted hitherto]. Working out these net increases presents no particular difficulties. They are calculated automatically, at the same time as one works out the "intermediate objectives" [mathematically, the solution to one problem immediately provides the solution to the other].

We have discussed the problem of how to determine the overall *volume* of investments. We can only touch on the problem of the *choice* of particular invest-

ments. Allocation of investment *by sectors* is automatic once the final investment is determined [a given level of final consumption directly or indirectly implies such and such an amount of productive capacity in each sector]. The choice of a given type of investment from among several producing the same result could only depend on such considerations as the effect that a given type of equipment would have on those who would have to use it—and here, from all we have said, their own viewpoint would be decisive.

From this point of view, when two comparable types of machinery are examined [thermal and hydroelectric power stations, for example], the criterion of profitability still applies. Here, where an “accounting-book” interest rate is used to make one’s calculations, socialist society will still be superior to a capitalist economy: For this “rate of interest,” the former will use the rate of expansion of its own economy; it can be shown—Von Neumann did it in 1937—that these two rates ought necessarily to be identical in a rational economy.)

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

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

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

The fundamental process of decision therefore will take the following form. Starting from below, there would be discussions in the general assemblies. Initial proposals would emanate from the workers’ councils of various enterprises and would deal with their own productive possibilities in the period to come. The plan factory would then regroup these various proposals, pointing out which ones were mutually incompatible or entailed undesirable effects on other sectors. It would elaborate a series of achievable targets, grouping them as far as possible in terms of their concrete implications. (Proposal A implies that factory X will increase production by  $r$  percent next year with the help of additional

equipment Y. Proposal B, on the other hand, implies . . .) There would then be a full discussion of the various overall proposals, throughout the general assemblies and by all the workers' councils, possibly with counterproposals and a repetition of the procedure described. A final discussion would then lead to a simple majority vote in the general assemblies of each enterprise.

### The Management of the Economy

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

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

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

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

Once adopted, a given plan provides the framework of economic activities for a given period of time. It establishes a starting point for economic life. But in a socialist society, the plan will not *dominate* economic life. It is only a starting point, to be constantly reexamined and modified as necessary. Neither the economic life of society—nor its life overall—can be based on a dead technical rationality, given once and for all. Society cannot alienate itself from its own decisions. It is not only that real life will almost of necessity diverge, in many aspects, from the "most perfect" plan in the world. It is also that the workers'

self-managerial activity will constantly tend to alter, both directly and indirectly, the basic data and targets of the plan. New products, new means of production, new methods, new problems, new difficulties, and new solutions will constantly be emerging. Working times will be reduced. Prices will fall, entailing consumer reactions and displacements of demand. Some of these modifications will affect only a single factory, others several factories, and yet others, no doubt, the economy as a whole. (From this angle—and if they weren't false in the first place—Russian figures that show that year after year the targets of the plan have been fulfilled to 101 percent would provide the severest possible indictment of the Russian economy and of Russian society. They would signify, in effect, that during a given five-year period *nothing* happened in the country, that not a single new idea arose in anyone's mind—or else that Stalin, in his wisdom, had foreseen all such ideas and incorporated them in advance in the plan, allowing—in his kindness—inventors to savor the pleasures of illusory discovery.) The “plan factory” therefore will not just operate once every five years; it will daily have to tackle some problem or another.

All this deals mainly with the *form* of workers' management of the economy and with the mechanisms and institutions that will ensure that it functions in a democratic manner. These forms will allow society to give to the management of the economy the *content* it chooses. In a narrower sense, they will enable society to orient economic development freely.

### *The Content of the Management of the Economy*

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

In its initial phase, to be sure, socialist society will concern itself with satis-

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

### **The Management of Society**

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

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

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

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

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



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

*The Councils: Exclusive and Exhaustive Form of Organization for the Whole Population*

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

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

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

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

In a country such as France—classically considered “backward” as far as the numerical importance of its peasantry is concerned—the workers' power will not have to fear a “wheat strike.” It will not have to organize punitive expeditions into the countryside. Precisely because the peasant is concerned with his

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

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

(Complex but by no means insoluble economic problems will probably arise in this respect. They boil down to the question of how agricultural prices will be determined in a socialist economy. The application of *uniform* prices would maintain significant income inequalities ["differential rents"] between different rural communes or even between different farmers in a given commune. The ultimate solution to the problem would require, of course, the complete socialization of agriculture. In the meantime, compromises will be necessary. There might perhaps be some form of taxation on the wealthier communes combined with subsidies for the poorer ones until the gap between them had been substantially narrowed [to suppress inequalities completely by this means would amount, however, to forcible socialization]. One should note in passing that differential yields today stem in part from the artificial maintenance of farming on poor-yield soils through subsidies paid by the capitalist State for basically political purposes. Socialist society could rapidly lessen these gaps by refusing to subsidize nonprofitable farming activities—while at the same time massively helping to equip poor but potentially viable communes.)

What about groups of workers involved in *services* of various kinds (from

commercial, banking, and insurance company staff to workers in entertainment to all the ex-State administrators)?<sup>21</sup> There is no reason why the pattern of their self-organization should not resemble that pertaining to industry as a whole. And what about the thousand-and-one petty trades existing in towns (shopkeepers, “personal services,” artisans, some of the “liberal professions,” etc.)? Here the pattern of organization could resemble what we have outlined for an “atomized” occupation such as agriculture. A working-class power will never seek to socialize these occupations by force. It will only require that these categories group themselves into associations or cooperatives, which will at one and the same time constitute their representative political organs and their responsible units in relation to the management of the economy as a whole. There will be no question, for instance, of socialized industry individually supplying each particular shop or artisan. Instead, it will supply the cooperatives that these shopkeepers or artisans will be members of, and will entrust to these collectives the job of organizing within their own ranks. At the political level, people in these occupations will seek representation through councils or they won’t be represented at all, for there won’t be any elections of either the Western or Russian types.

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

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

*The Councils: Universal Form of Organization for Social Activities*

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

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

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

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

(Although the Russian word "soviet" means "council," one should not confuse the workers' councils we have been describing in this text with even the earliest Russian soviets. The workers' councils are based on one's place of work.

They can play both a political role and a role in the industrial management of production. In its essence, a workers' council is a universal organ. The 1905 Petrograd Soviet (Council) of Workers' Deputies, although the product of a general strike and, although exclusively proletarian in composition, remained a purely political organ. The soviets of 1917 were as a rule geographically based. They too were purely political institutions, in which all social layers opposed to the old regime formed a united front [see Trotsky's *1905* and his *History of the Russian Revolution*]. Their role corresponded to the "backwardness" of the Russian economy and of Russian society at the time as well as to the "bourgeois-democratic" aspects of the 1917 revolution. In this sense, they belonged to the past. The normal form of working-class representation in the present age undoubtedly is the workers' council.)

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

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

### *The Industrial Organization of the "State"*

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

In class societies, and in particular under classical nineteenth-century "liberal" capitalism, the ultimate function of the State was to guarantee the maintenance of existing social relations through the exercise of a legal monopoly on violence. In this sense, Lenin was right, against the reformists of his day, to adopt Engels's description of the State as nothing more than "special bodies of armed men, and prisons."<sup>22</sup> In the course of a socialist revolution, there was no doubt as to the fate of this State: Its apparatus was to be smashed, the "special detachments of armed men" dissolved and replaced by the arming of the people, and the permanent bureaucracy abolished and replaced by elected and revocable officials.

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

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

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

But this very evolution of the modern State contains the seed of a solution. The modern State has become a gigantic enterprise—by far the most important enterprise in modern society. It can exercise its *managerial* functions only to the extent that it has created a whole network of organs of *execution*, within which work has become collective, subject to a division of labor, and specialized. What has happened here is the same as what has happened to the management of production in particular enterprises. But it has happened on a much vaster scale. In their overwhelming majority, today's governmental departments only carry out specific and limited tasks. They are "enterprises," specializing in certain types of work. Some are socially necessary. Others are purely parasitic or are only necessary in order to maintain the class structure of society. The "powers that be" have no more intrinsic connection with the work of "their" departments than they have, say, with the production of automobiles. The notion of "power" or "administrative rights" that remains appended to what are in fact a series of "public services" is a juridical legacy, without real content. Its only purpose is to shield from criticism the arbitrary and irresponsible behavior of those at the top of various bureaucratic pyramids.<sup>23</sup>

Given these conditions, the solution does not lie in the "election and revoca-

bility of all civil servants.” This is neither necessary (these officials exercise no real power) nor possible (they are specialized workers, whom one could no more “elect” than one would elect electricians or doctors). The solution will lie in the *industrial organization*, pure and simple, of most of today’s governmental departments. In many cases this would only be giving formal recognition to an existing state of affairs. Concretely, such industrial organization would mean:

1. The explicit transformation of these “administrative” departments into *enterprises* having the same status as any other enterprise. In many of these new enterprises the mechanization and automation of work could be systematically developed to a considerable degree.
2. The *management* of these enterprises will be through workers’ councils, representing those who work there. These office workers, like all others, will determine autonomously the organization of their own work. (The formation of workers’ councils of State employees was one of the demands of the Hungarian workers’ councils.)
3. The function of these enterprises will be *confined* to the execution of the tasks assigned to them by the representative institutions of society.

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

### *The Central Power: The Assembly and the Governmental Council*

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

1. The material basis of authority and coercion, “the specialized bands of armed men and prisons” (in other words, the army and the law);
2. Foreign and domestic “politics,” in the narrow sense (in other words, the problems that might arise for a working-class power if it was confronted with internal opposition or with the persistence of hostile exploiting regimes in other countries);
3. Real politics: the overall vision, coordination, and general purpose and direction of social life.

Concerning the army, it is obvious that “the specialized bands of armed men” will be dissolved and then replaced by the armed populace. Workers in factories, offices, and rural communes will constitute the units of a nonpermanent, territorially based militia, each council being in charge of policing its own area. Regional regroupings will enable local units to become integrated and will allow the rational use of heavier armaments. The extent to which “strategic” types of weapons (which can be used only on a centralized basis) will remain necessary

cannot be decided a priori. If it proved necessary, each council would probably contribute a contingent to the formation of certain central units, which would be under the control of the central assembly of councils.

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

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

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

This organization will be made up first of all of the workers' councils and the general assemblies of each particular enterprise, the vital collective setting within which there can be a confrontation of views and an elaboration of informed political opinions. They will be the ultimate sovereign authorities for all political decisions. But there will also be a central institution, directly emanating from these grass-roots organizations, namely, the central assembly of councils. The existence of such a body is necessary, not only because some problems require an immediate decision (even if such a decision may subsequently be reversed by the population), but more particularly because preliminary checking, clarification, and elaboration of the facts are almost always necessary before any meaningful decision can be made. To ask the people as a whole to voice their opinions without such preparation would often be a mystification and a negation of democracy (because it would eliminate the possibility of people deciding in full knowledge of the relevant facts). There must be a framework for discussing problems and for submitting them to popular decision—or even for suggesting



that they should be discussed. These are not just “technical” functions. They are *deeply political*, and the body that would initiate them would be a *central power*—although very different in its structure and role from any contemporary central body—that socialist society could not do without.

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

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

Those elected to the central assembly will elect from within their own ranks—or will appoint to act in rotation—a central governmental council, composed perhaps of a few dozen members. The tasks of this body will be restricted to preparing the work of the central assembly of councils, acting in its stead when it is not in session, and convening the assembly for emergency sessions if necessary.

If this governmental council exceeded its jurisdiction and made a decision that could or should have been submitted to the central assembly, or if it made any unacceptable decisions, these could immediately be rescinded by the next meeting of the central assembly, which could also take any other necessary measures, up to and including the “dissolution” of its own council. Likewise, if the central assembly made any decision that exceeded its jurisdiction, or that went against the will of the local workers’ councils or the local general assemblies, it will be up to these bodies to take any steps necessary, beginning with the revocation of their delegates to the central assembly. Neither the central council nor the central assembly could persevere in unacceptable practices (they have no power of their own, they are revocable, and in the last analysis, the population is armed). But if the central assembly allowed its council to exceed its rights—or if members of local assemblies allowed their delegates to the central assembly to

exceed their authority—nothing could be done. The population *can* exercise political power only if it *wants* to. The organization proposed merely ensures that the population *could* exercise such power, if it *wanted* to.

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

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

All this warrants some comment. Modern sociologists often claim that the content of modern politics and its modes of expression are inevitable. They believe that the separation of politics from life is due to irreversible technical changes that make any real democracy impossible.<sup>24</sup> It is alleged that the content of politics—namely, the direction and management of society—has become highly complex, embracing an extraordinary mass of data and problems, each of which can be mastered only through advanced specialization. All this allegedly being so, it is proclaimed as self-evident that these problems could never be put to the public in any intelligible way—or only by simplifying them to a degree that would distort them altogether. Why be surprised then that ordinary people take no more interest in politics than they do in differential calculus?

If these "arguments"—presented as the very latest in political sociology but in fact as old as the world (Plato discusses them at length, and his *Protagoras* is in part devoted to them)—prove anything, it is not that democracy is a utopian

illusion but that the *very management of society*, by whatever means, has become impossible. The politician, according to these premises, would have to be the Incarnation of Absolute and Total Knowledge. No technical specialization, however advanced, entitles its possessor to master areas other than his own. An assembly of technicians, each the highest authority in his particular field, would have no competence (as an assembly of technicians) to solve anything. Only one individual could comment on any specific point, and no one would be in a position to comment on any general problem.

Indeed, modern society is not managed by technicians as such (and never could be). Those who manage it do not incarnate Absolute Knowledge—but rather generalized incompetence. In fact, modern society is hardly managed at all—it merely drifts. Just like the top management of the bureaucratic apparatus heading up some big factory, a modern political “leadership” only renders verdicts—and thoroughly arbitrary ones at that. It decides between the opinions of the various technical departments that are designed to “assist” it, but over which it has very little control. In this, our rulers feel the repercussions in their own social system and experience the same political alienation they impose on the rest of society. The chaos of their own social organization and the narrow development of each branch for its own exclusive ends render impossible a rational exercise of their own power—even in their own terms.<sup>25</sup>

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

Political technique is based essentially on the techniques of information and of communication. We are here using the term “technique” in the widest sense (the *material means* of information and communication comprise only a part of the corresponding techniques). To place the *technique of information* at the service of democracy does not only mean to put material means of expression in the hands of the people (essential as this may be). Nor does it mean the dissemination of *all* information, or of *any* information whatsoever. It means first and foremost to put at the disposal of mankind the elements necessary to enable people to decide in full knowledge of the relevant facts. This means that each person will receive a faithful translation of essential data relating to the problems that will have to be decided upon. This information will be expressed in the form of a finite number of succinctly stated and meaningful details. With respect to the plan factory, we have given a specific example of how information could be used so as vastly to increase people’s areas of freedom. In this case, genuine informa-

tion would not end up burying everyone under whole libraries of textbooks on economics, technology, and statistics: The information that would result from this would be strictly nil. The information provided by the plan factory would be *compact, significant, sufficient, and true*. Everyone will know what he will have to contribute and the level of consumption he will enjoy if this or that variant of the plan is adopted. This is how technique (in this instance, economic analysis, statistics, and computers) can be put in the service of democracy in a key area. There is no “cybernetic politics” that could tell us how to make a decision; only people can determine the elements required to make decisions.

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

In fact, there are several ways of envisaging and achieving representative democracy. A legislature is one form. Councils are another, and it is difficult to see how political alienation could arise in a council system operating according to its own rules. If modern techniques of communication were put in the service of democracy, the areas where representative democracy would remain necessary would narrow considerably. Material distances are smaller in the modern world than they were in Attica, in the fifth century B.C. At that time, the voice range of the orator—and hence the number of people he could reach—was limited by the functional capacity of his vocal cords. Today it is unlimited.<sup>26</sup> In the realm of communicating ideas, distances have not only narrowed—they have disappeared. If society felt it were necessary, tomorrow it could establish a general assembly of the whole population in any modern country. Closed-circuit radio and television hookups easily could link a vast number of general assemblies, in various factories, offices, or rural communes. Similar, but more limited, hookups could be established in a vast number of cases. In any case, the sessions of the central assembly or of its council easily could be televised. This, combined with the revocability of all delegates, would readily ensure that any central institution remained under the permanent control of the population. It would profoundly alter the very notion of “representation.” (It certainly would be amusing to televise today’s parliamentary sessions; this would be an excellent way of lowering TV set sales.)

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

The length of speeches, moreover, often varies inversely with the weight of

their content. Russian leaders sometimes talk on for four hours at Party Congresses without saying anything. The speech of the Ephor that persuaded the Spartans to launch the Peloponnesian War occupies twenty-one lines of Thucydides (I, 86). For an account of the laconicism of revolutionary assemblies, see Trotsky's accounts of the Petrograd soviet of 1905<sup>27</sup>—or accounts of the meetings of factory representatives in Budapest in 1956 (*S. ou B.*, 21 [March 1957], pp. 91-92.)

People bemoan the fact that the size of the modern "city" compared with those of yesterday (tens of millions rather than tens of thousands) renders direct democracy impossible. They are doubly blind. They do not see, first, that modern society has recreated the very milieu (the workplace) where such democracy could be reinstaured. Nor do they see that modern society has created and will continue to create for an indefinite period of time the technical means for a genuine democracy on a massive scale. They envisage the only solution to the problems of the supersonic age in the horse-and-buggy terms of parliamentary political machinery. And they then conclude that democracy has become "impossible." They claim to have made a "new" analysis—and they have ignored what is *really* new in our epoch: the material possibilities of at last freely transforming the world through technique, and through the proletariat, which is its living vehicle.

#### *The "State," "Parties," and "Politics"*

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

Freed from all the rubbish and mystifications currently surrounding it, politics in such a society will be nothing but the collective search for, debate about, and adoption of solutions to the general problems concerning the future of society—whether these be economic or educational, whether they dealt with the rest of the world or with domestic relations between various social strata or

classes. All these decisions concern the *whole* of the population and they will be theirs to make.

It is probable, even certain, that there will be different views about such problems. Each approach will seek to be as coherent and systematic as possible. People will subscribe to particular viewpoints, though they will be dispersed geographically or occupationally. These people will come together to defend their views—in other words, they will form political groups. On the national level, the councils will have to decide whether they consider the general orientation of this or that party compatible with the makeup of the new society, and therefore whether such parties will be allowed to function on a legal basis.

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

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

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

If political organizations expressing the survival of different interests and ideologies persist, a working-class socialist party, a partisan defender of proletarian socialist organization also will exist. It will be open to all those who favor total power for the councils and will differ from all others, both in its program *and in its practice*, precisely on this point: Its fundamental activity will be directed toward the concentration of power in the councils and to their becoming the *only*

centers of political life. This implies that it will struggle against power being held by any particular party, whichever one it may be.

It is obvious that the democratic power structure of a socialist society excludes the possibility of a Party "holding power." The very words would be meaningless within the framework we have described. Insofar as major trends of opinion might arise or diverge on important issues, the holders of majority viewpoints might be elected as delegates to the councils, assemblies, communes, etc., more often than others. (This does not necessarily follow, however, for delegates will be elected mainly on the basis of overall confidence, and not always according to their opinion on this or that issue.) Parties will not be organizations seeking power, and the central assembly of councils will not be a "workers' parliament"; people will not be elected to it as members of a party. The same goes for any government chosen by this assembly.<sup>28</sup>

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

### *Freedom and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*

The problem of political freedom arises in two forms: freedom for political organizations and the rights of various social strata of the population. Nationally, the councils alone will be in a position to judge to what extent the activities of any given political organization could be tolerated. The basic criterion that ought to guide their judgment will be whether the organization in question was seeking to reestablish an exploiting regime. In other words, was it trying to abolish the power of the councils? If they judged this to be the case, the councils will have the right and the duty to defend themselves, at the ultimate limit of curtailing such activities. But this yardstick will not provide an automatic answer in every specific instance for the very good reason that such an automatic answer never could exist. In each case, the councils will have to bear the political responsibility for their answer, steering a course between two equal and very serious dangers: either to allow freedom of action to enemies of socialism who seek to destroy it—or to kill self-management by themselves through extreme restrictions on political freedom. There is no absolute or abstract answer to this dilemma. Nor is it any use trying to minimize the extent of the problem by saying

that any important political tendency would be represented *inside* the councils: It is perfectly possible and even quite probable that there will exist within the councils tendencies *opposed* to their total power.

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

It is hardly necessary to add that although it might prove necessary to limit the *political activity* of this or that organization, no limitation is conceivable in the domains of *ideology* or of *culture*. A genuine socialist society can only entail a much greater variety of tendencies, “schools,” and so on, than exists today.

Another problem, independent of the question of political organizations, arises: Should all sections of the population have the same rights from the start? Are they equally able to participate in the political management of society? What does the dictatorship of the proletariat mean in such circumstances?

The dictatorship of the proletariat means the incontrovertible *fact* that the initiative for and the direction of the socialist revolution and subsequent transformation of society can only belong to the proletariat in the factories. Therefore it means that the point of departure and the center of socialist power will quite literally be the workers’ councils. But the proletariat does not aim at instituting a dictatorship *over* society and over the other strata of the population. Its aim is the instauration of socialism, a society in which differences between strata or classes must diminish rapidly and soon disappear. The proletariat will be able to take society in the direction of socialism only to the extent that it associates other sections of the population with its aims. Or to the extent that it grants them the fullest autonomy compatible with the general orientation of society. Or that it raises them to the rank of active *subjects* of political management and does not see them as *objects* of its own control—which would be in conflict with its whole outlook. All this is expressed in the *general* organization of the population into councils, in the extensive *autonomy* of the councils in their own domain, and in



the *participation* of all these councils in the central power, as we have described it here.

What happens if the working class does not vastly outnumber the rest of the population? Or if the revolution is from the start in a particularly difficult position, other strata being actively hostile to the power of the workers' councils? The dictatorship of the proletariat will then find concrete expression in an *unequal* participation of the various strata of society in the central power. In the beginning, for example, the proletariat might have to grant a smaller voice to the peasants' councils than to other councils, even if it allows this voice to grow as class tensions diminish.

But the real implications of these questions are limited. The working class could keep power only if it gained the support of the majority of those who work for a living, even if they are not industrial workers. In modern societies, wage and salary earners constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, and each day their numerical importance increases. If the majority of industrial workers *and other wage earners and salaried personnel* supported a revolutionary power, the regime could not be endangered by the political opposition of the peasants, who are not, indeed, one homogeneous bloc. If the aforementioned sections did *not* support revolutionary power, it is difficult to see how the revolution could triumph [*s'instaurer*], and even more how it could last for any length of time.

### Problems of the "Transition"

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

The society we are talking about is socialism, and socialism is the *only transitional* society between a regime of exploitation and communism. What is not socialism (as here defined) is not a transitional society but an *exploiting* society. We might say that any exploiting society is a "society in transition," but it is "in transition to another form of exploitation." The transition *to communism* is only possible if *exploitation* is immediately abolished, for otherwise exploitation continues and feeds on itself. The abolition of exploitation is only possible when *every separate stratum of directors* ceases to exist, for in modern societies it is the division between directors and executives that is at the root of exploitation. The abolition of a separate managerial apparatus means *workers' management* in all sectors of social activity. Workers' management is only possible within the framework of new organizational forms embodying the direct democracy of the producers (as represented by the *councils*). Workers' management can be consolidated and enlarged only insofar as it attacks the deepest roots of alienation in all fields and primarily in the realm of *work*.

In their essence these views closely coincide with Marx's and Lenin's ideas on the subject. Marx envisaged only *one* kind of transitional society between capitalism and communism, which he called indifferently "dictatorship of the pro-

letariat” or “lower stage of communism.” For him there was no doubt this society would signify from day one an end to exploitation and to a separate state apparatus.<sup>29</sup> Lenin’s positions on this question, as elaborated in *State and Revolution*, merely explain and defend Marx’s theses against the reformists of his day.

These elementary truths have been systematically hidden and distorted since the Russian Revolution degenerated. Let us leave aside the Stalinists, whose historic job it has been to present concentration camps, the absolute power of factory managers, piece rates, and Stakhanovism as the finished products of socialism. In a more subtle, but just as dangerous, form, the same mystification has been propagated by the Trotskyists and by Trotsky himself. They have managed to invent an increasing number of transitional societies, fitting more or less comfortably next to each other. Between communism and capitalism there was socialism. But between socialism and capitalism there was the workers’ State. And between the workers’ State and capitalism there was the “degenerated workers’ State” (degeneration being a process, there were gradations: degenerated, very degenerated, monstrously degenerated, etc.). After the war, according to the Trotskyists, we witnessed the birth of a whole series of “degenerated workers’ States” (the satellite countries of Eastern Europe), which were degenerated without ever having been workers’ States. All these gymnastics were performed so as to avoid having to admit that Russia had become again an exploiting society without a shred of socialism about it, and so as to avoid drawing the conclusion that the fate of the Russian Revolution made it imperative to reexamine *all* the problems relating to the program and content of socialism, to the role of the proletariat, to the role of the party, etc.

The idea of a “transitional society” other than the socialist society we have spoken about is a mystification. This is not to say—far from it—that *problems* of transition do not exist. In a sense, the whole of socialist society is determined by the existence of these problems and by people’s attempt to solve them. But problems of transition will also exist in a narrower sense. They will flow from the concrete conditions that will confront any socialist revolution at the start. These initial conditions will make it more or less easy to bring about socialism; they will guide socialist society toward particular ways of giving concrete form to what are the basic principles of socialism.

For instance, the revolution can only begin in one country, or in one group of countries. As a result, it will have to endure pressures of extremely varying kinds and durations. On the other hand, however swiftly the revolution spreads internationally, a country’s level of internal development will play an important role in how the principles of socialism will be concretely applied. For example, agriculture might create important problems in France—but not in the United States—or Great Britain (where, inversely, the main problem would be that of the country’s extreme dependence on food imports). In the course of our analysis, we have considered several problems of this kind and hope to have shown that solutions tending in a socialist direction existed in each case.

We have not been able to consider the special problems that would arise if the revolution remained isolated in one country for a long time—and we can hardly

do it here. But we hope to have shown that it is wrong to think that the problems arising from such isolation are insoluble, that an isolated workers' power must die heroically or degenerate, or that at the most it can "hold on" while waiting. *The only way to "hold on" is to start building socialism*; otherwise, degeneration has already set in, and there is nothing to hold on for. For workers' power, the building of socialism *from the very first day* is not only possible, it is imperative. If it does not take place the power held has already ceased to be workers' power.

All the discussion about "socialism in one country" between the Stalinists and the Left Opposition (1924-27) shows to a frightening degree how men make history thinking they know what they are doing, yet understand nothing about it. Stalin insisted it was possible to build socialism in Russia alone, meaning by socialism industrialization plus the power of the bureaucracy. Trotsky vowed that this was impossible, meaning by socialism a classless society. Both were right in what they said, and wrong in denying the truth of the other's allegation. But neither was in fact talking about socialism. And no one, during the whole discussion, mentioned the system of rule inside Russian factories, the relation of the proletariat to the management of production, or the relation of the Bolshevik party, where the discussion was taking place, to the proletariat, who were in the long run the main interested party in the whole business.

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

- Federate into a central assembly and declare themselves the only power in the land;
- Proceed to arm the proletariat and order the dissolution of the police and of the standing army;
- Proclaim the expropriation of the capitalists, the dismissal of all managers, and the takeover of the management of all factories by the workers, themselves organized into workers' councils;
- Proclaim the abolition of work norms and instaurate full equality of wages and salaries;
- Encourage other categories of wage earners to form councils and to take into their own hands the management of their respective enterprises;
- Ask workers in governmental departments, in particular, to form councils and proclaim the transformation of these administrative bodies into enterprises managed by those who work in them;
- Encourage the peasants and other self-employed sections of the population to group themselves into councils and to send their representatives to a central assembly;

- Proceed to organize a “plan factory” and promptly submit a provisional economic plan for discussion by the local councils;
- Call on the workers of other countries and explain to them the content and meaning of these measures.

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

### Notes

1. This following part will be published in the next issue of *S. ou B.* [T/E: See the next chapter in this volume.]

2. The *present* “Supreme Soviet,” of course.

3. The expression is to be found in part 3 of Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*. [T/E: The French phrase is “en connaissance de cause.” Castoriadis refers to a passage in section 2 of this third part, pp. 309-10, of the edition we are using (trans. Emile Burns, ed. C. P. Dutt [New York: International Publishers, 1939]). This edition translates the phrase in question merely as “with complete understanding.”]

4. A few years ago a certain “philosopher” could seriously ask how one could even discuss Stalin’s decisions, since one did not know the real facts upon which he alone could base them. (J.-P. Sartre, “Les Communistes et la Paix,” in *Les Temps Modernes*, 81, 84-85, and 101 [July and October-November 1952, April 1954]; trans. Martha H. Fletcher, *The Communists and the Peace* [New York: George Braziller, 1968].)

5. Lenin took the opportunity, in *State and Revolution*, to defend the idea of direct democracy against the reformists of his day who contemptuously called it “primitive democracy.”

6. On this feature of working life, see Paul Romano, “L’Ouvrier américain,” in *S. ou B.*, 5-6 (March 1950), pp. 129-32 [T/E: “Life in the Factory,” in *The American Worker* (1947; reprinted, Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1972), pp. 37-39], and R. Berthier, “Une Expérience d’organisation ouvrière,” in *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956), pp. 29-31.

7. The great contribution of the American group that publishes *Correspondence* has been to resume the analysis of *the crisis of society from the standpoint of production* and to apply it to the conditions of our age. See their texts, translated and published in *S. ou B.*: Paul Romano’s “L’Ouvrier américain” (nos. 1 to 5-6 [March 1949 to March 1950]) and “La Reconstruction de la société” (nos. 7-8 [August 1951 and January 1952]) [T/E: see “Life in the Factory” and “The Reconstruction of Society,” in *The American Worker*]. In France, it is Philippe Guillaume who has revived this way of looking at things (see his article, “Machinisme et prolétariat,” in no. 7 [August 1951] of this review). I am indebted to him, directly or indirectly, for several ideas used in the present text.

8. K. Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), vol. 3, p. 820.

9. Daniel Mothé’s text, “L’Usine et la gestion ouvrière,” also in this issue [*S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957), pp. 75ff.] already is one de facto response—coming from the factory itself—to the concrete problem of shop-floor workers’ management and that of how to organize work. In referring to this text, we are considering here only the problems of the factory as a whole.

10. In J. A. C. Brown’s *The Social Psychology of Industry* (London: Penguin, 1954), there is a striking contrast between the devastating analysis the author makes of present capitalist production and the only “conclusions” he can draw, which are pious exhortations to management that it should “do better,” “democratize itself,” etc. Let it not be said, however, that an “industrial sociologist” takes no position, that he merely describes facts and does not suggest norms. Advising the managerial apparatus to “do better” is itself a taking of a position, one that has been shown here to be completely utopian.

11. See the the Twentieth Congress texts analyzed by Claude Lefort in “Le Totalitarisme sans Staline,” *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956), in particular, pp. 59-62 [now in *Elements*, pp. 166ff.; T/E: 1979 ed., pp. 203ff.].

12. See Mothé, “L’Usine et la gestion ouvrière.”

13. On the extreme overstaffing of “nonproductive” departments in today’s factories, see G.

Vivier, "La Vie en usine," *S. ou B.*, 12 (August 1953), pp. 39-41. Vivier estimates that in the business he describes, "without a rational reorganization of these departments, 30% of the employees already are redundant" (emphasis in the original).

14. See Mothé, "L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière."

15. *Ibid.*

16. Bureaucratic "planning" as carried out in Russia and the Eastern European countries proves nothing, one way or the other. It is just as irrational and just as anarchic and wasteful as the capitalist "market"—though in different ways. The waste is both "external" (the wrong decisions being made) and "internal" (brought about by the resistance of the workers) to the production process. For further details, see *PRAB*.

17. The field is in constant expansion. The starting points remain, however, Leontief's *The Structure of American Economy, 1919-1939: An Empirical Application of Equilibrium Analysis* (1951; reprinted, Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1976), and the essays by Leontief et al., *Studies in the Structure of the American Economy: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in Input-Output Analysis* (1953; reprinted, Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1976).

18. Tjalling Koopmans, *Activity Analysis of Production and Allocation* (1951; reprinted, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972).

19. The 1955 Nantes strikes took place around an antihierarchical demand for a uniform increase for everyone. The Hungarian workers' councils demanded the abolition of norms and severe limitations on hierarchy. What inadvertently is said in official Russian proclamations indicates that a permanent struggle against hierarchy is taking place in the factories of that country. See *PRAB*.

20. For a detailed discussion of the problem of hierarchy, see *RPR*, section 5, and *DC*, in *S. ou B.*, 13 (January 1954), pp. 67-69.

21. On the structure of a large insurance company undergoing rapid "industrialization," both technically as well as socially and politically, see the articles by Henri Collet ("La Grève aux A.G.-Vie," in *S. ou B.*, 7 [August 1951], pp. 103-10) and R. Berthier ("Une Expérience d'organisation ouvrière: Le Conseil du personnel des A.G.-Vie," in *S. ou B.*, 20 [December 1957], pp. 1-64). On the same process taking place within the United States, where "tertiary" sectors are being merged, see C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951, esp. pp. 192-98). In order to take stock of the significance of the changes that are expected to occur in these areas, we must remember that the industrialization of office and "service" work (and, ultimately, the industrialization of "intellectual" work) is still in its infancy. Cf. N. Wiener, *Cybernetics* (New York: Wiley, 1948), pp. 37-38. In an entirely different sector, that of theater and film, it is interesting to compare the ideas expounded in this article with the multiple (economic, political, work-management) role the Revolutionary Workers' Committee of this sector played during the Hungarian Revolution. See "Les Artistes du théâtre et du cinéma pendant la révolution hongroise," in *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1957), pp. 96-104.

22. See section 2 of Chapter 1 of *State and Revolution*.

23. See Chapter 4 ("Technique and the State") of Jacques Ellul's *The Technological Society*, trans. J. Wilkinson, intro. Robert K. Merton (New York: Knopf, 1964). In spite of his fundamentally incorrect outlook, Ellul has the merit of analyzing some of these key aspects of the reality of the modern State, aspects that are blithely ignored by most sociologists and political writers—whether "Marxist" or not.

24. This is Ellul's point of view, as expressed in *The Technological Society*. Ellul concludes that "it is futile to try to put a halt to this process or to grasp ahold of it and guide it." For him, technique is only the self-developing process of enslavement taking place independently of any social context. [T/E: I have translated Castoriadis's quotation of Ellul.]

25. See C. Wright Mills (*White Collar*, pp. 347-48, and *The Power Elite* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1956], pp. 134ff., 145ff., etc.) for an illustration of the total lack of *any* relationship between "technical" capacities of *any* kind, on the one hand, and current industrial management or political leadership groups, on the other.

26. "Plato defined the limits of the size of the city as the number of people who could hear the voice of a single orator: today those limits do not define a city but a civilization. Wherever neotechnic instruments exist and a common language is used there are now the elements of almost as close a political unity as that which once was possible in the tiniest cities of Attica. The possibilities

for good and evil here are immense” (Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934], p. 241).

27. *1905*, trans. Anya Bostock (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 109.

28. The events in Poland have furnished yet another confirmation of the idea that the Party cannot be a governmental organ (see “La Révolution prolétarienne contre la bureaucratie,” in *S. ou B.*, 20 [December 1956], p. 167 [T/E: “The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy,” pp. 84-85], and “La Voie polonaise de la bureaucratisation,” *S. ou B.*, 21 [March 1957], pp. 65-66 [now in *SB 2*, pp. 327-29 and 348-52]).

29. See “Critique of the Gotha Programme.”

a) Chief executive officer of Renault at the time.

## On the Content of Socialism, III: The Workers' Struggle against the Organization of the Capitalist Enterprise

We have tried to show<sup>1</sup> that socialism is nothing other than people's conscious self-organization of their own lives in all domains; that it signifies, therefore, the management of production by the producers themselves on the scale of the workplace as well as on that of the economy as a whole; that it implies the abolition of every ruling apparatus separated from society; that it has to bring about a profound modification of technology and of the very meaning of work as people's primordial activity and, conjointly, an overthrow of all the values toward which capitalist society implicitly or explicitly is oriented.

This elaboration allows us in the first place to unmask the mystifications that have been built up for many long years around the notion of socialism. It allows us to understand first of all what socialism *is not*. Cast in this light, Russia, China, and the "popular democracies" show their true face as exploitative class societies. With respect to the present discussion at least, the fact that bureaucrats have taken the place of private employers appears to be of absolutely no consequence.

But it allows us to say much more. Only by beginning with this notion of socialism can we comprehend and analyze the crisis of contemporary society. Going beyond the superficial spheres of the market, consumption, and "politics," we can see now that this crisis is directly tied to the most deep-seated trait of capitalism: the alienation of man in his fundamental activity, productive activity. Insofar as this alienation creates a permanent conflict at every stage and in all sectors of social life, there is a crisis of exploitative society. This conflict is expressed in two forms: both as the workers' *struggle* against alienation and against its conditions, and as people's *absence* from society, their passivity, discouragement,

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ment, retreat, and isolation. In both cases, beyond a certain point this conflict leads to the overt crisis of the established society: when people's struggle against alienation reaches a certain intensity it becomes revolution. But when their abstention from society goes beyond a certain limit, the system collapses, as the evolution of Poland's economy and society in 1955 and 1956 clearly shows.<sup>2</sup> Oscillating between these two limits, there unfolds daily life in modern societies. These societies succeed in functioning only in spite of their own norms, inasmuch as there is struggle against alienation and inasmuch as this struggle does not go beyond a certain level. Such societies therefore are based on a fundamentally irrational premise.

In resuming our analysis of the crisis of capitalism, we start therefore with an explicit notion of the content of socialism. This notion is the privileged center, the focal point that permits us to organize all perspectives and to see everything again with new eyes. Without it, everything becomes chaos, fragmentary statements, naive relativism, mere empirical sociology.

But this is not an a priori notion. The proletariat's struggle against alienation and its conditions can take place and develop only by setting forth—be it in the shape of real relations between people, be it in the shape of demands, aspirations, and programs—forms and contents of a socialist nature. Consequently, the positive notion of socialism is only the historical product of preceding developments, and in the very first place, of the activity, the struggles, and the mode of living of the proletariat in modern society. It is the provisional systematization of the points of view that the history of the proletariat offers, of its most everyday gestures as well as its most ambitious actions.

In a shop, the workers set things up among themselves in order to make the maximum amount in bonuses as well as to produce less than the norms. In Budapest, they battle against Russian tanks, organize themselves into councils, and lay claim to the management of the factories. In the United States, they insist on stopping the assembly line twice a day so they can have a cup of coffee. At the Bréguet factories in Paris last spring, they went on strike and called for the abolition of most of the categories into which they are divided by management. For more than a century they have gotten killed crying, "To live working or to die fighting." In the "socialist" factories of the Russian bureaucracy, they force wages to be leveled out, despite the bitter complaints Khrushchev and his clique make in their speeches. With different degrees of development and various levels of clarification, all of these manifestations and, figuratively speaking, half of all the everyday actions of hundreds of millions of workers in all the enterprises of the world express this struggle for the instauration of new relations among people and with their work. And these manifestations and actions are comprehensible only in terms of a socialist perspective.

We must understand fully the dialectical unity the following diverse moments constitute: the analysis as well as the critique of capitalism, and the positive definition of the content of socialism as well as the interpretation of the proletariat's history. No critique, not even an analysis of the crisis of capitalism, is possible outside of a socialist perspective. Indeed, such a critique could not be based



upon nothing at all—unless it be upon an ethics, which twenty-five centuries of philosophy have succeeded neither in founding nor even in defining. Every critique presupposes that something other than what it criticizes is possible and preferable. Every critique of capitalism therefore presupposes socialism.

Inversely, this notion of socialism cannot be merely the positive, flip side of this critique; the circle would then run the risk of becoming completely utopian. The positive content of socialism can be derived only from the real history, from the real life of the class that is tending toward its realization. Here we have its ultimate source.

But neither does it mean that the conception of socialism is the passive and complete *reflection* of the history of the proletariat. It is based just as much upon a *choice*, which is merely the expression of a revolutionary political attitude. This choice is not arbitrary, for there is here no rational alternative. The alternative would be simply the conclusion that history is only a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,” and that it can only remain so. It is only in terms of a revolutionary politics that the history of the proletariat can be the source of this politics.

For someone with a different attitude, this history is merely the source of statistics and monographs of anything at all and ultimately of nothing at all. Indeed, neither the critique of capitalism nor the positive definition of socialism, neither the interpretation of the history of the proletariat nor a revolutionary politics is possible outside of a theory. The socialist elements that the proletariat continually produces have to be extrapolated and generalized into the total project that is socialism, otherwise they are meaningless. The analysis and critique of class society have to be systematized, otherwise they have no portent of truth. Both are impossible without a theoretical labor in the proper sense, without an effort to rationalize that which is simply given.

This rationalization involves its own risks and contradictions. As theory it is obliged to begin with the logical and epistemological structures of present-day culture—which are in no way neutral forms, independent of their content, but which express rather, in an antagonistic and contradictory fashion, the attitudes, behaviors, and visions of its subject and object, which have their dialectical equivalents in the social relations of capitalism. Revolutionary theory therefore constantly runs the risk of falling under the influence of the dominant ideology in forms that are much more subtle and deep-seated, much more hidden and dangerous than the “direct” ideological influence traditionally denounced in opportunism, for example. Marxism has not escaped this fate, as we already have shown,<sup>3</sup> and we will provide still more such examples.

It is only by returning each time to the source, by confronting the *results* of theory with the real meaning of the proletariat’s life and history, that we can revolutionize our very *methods* of thought, which are inherited from class society, and can construct through successive upheavals a socialist theory. Only by assimilating all these points of view and their profound unity can we advance.

We begin our analysis of the crisis of capitalism with an analysis of the contradictions of the capitalist enterprise. The concepts and methods thus acquired in this primordial domain, the domain of production, will allow us then to gen-

eralize our investigation and subject the various social spheres and finally all of the social as such to this examination.

### **The Contradictions in the Capitalist Organization of the Enterprise**

For the traditional view, which is still quite widespread today, the contradictions and irrationality of capitalism exist and actively manifest themselves on the overall level of the economy, but affect the capitalist enterprise only by ricochet. Leaving aside the conditions imposed upon it by its integration into an irrational and anarchic market, the enterprise is the place where efficiency and capitalist rationalization reign supreme. Under penalty of death, competition obliges capitalism to pursue the maximum result with the minimum of means. For is this not the very goal of economics, the definition of its rationality? In order to arrive at this goal, it puts "science in the service of production" to an ever-increasing extent, and it rationalizes the labor process through the intermediary of engineers and technicians, those embodiments of operant rationality. It is absurd that these enterprises manufacture armaments, absurd that periodic crises make them work below capacity—but there is nothing to criticize in their organization. The rationality of this organization is the basis on which socialist society will be built once the anarchy of the market is eliminated and other goals—the satisfaction of needs rather than the maximization of profits—are assigned to production.

Lenin subscribed to this view absolutely. As for Marx himself, there was no basic difference. For him, the enterprise certainly is not pure rationalization. Or, more precisely, this type of rationalization contains a profound contradiction. It develops by enslaving living labor to dead labor, it signifies that the products of man's activity dominate man, and therefore it gives rise to a kind of oppression, a kind of mutilation that increases without ever stopping.

But it is a contradiction that is, if we can call it that, "philosophical," abstract, and this is so in two senses. First of all, it affects man's fate in production, and not production itself. The permanent mutilation of the producer, his transformation into a "fragment of a man" does not impede capitalist rationalization. It is merely its subjective side. Rationalization is exactly symmetrical to dehumanization. The same step carries both of them forward. To rationalize production means to ignore and even to deliberately crush people's habits, desires, needs, and tendencies insofar as these are opposed to the logic of productive efficiency, while ruthlessly subjecting all aspects of labor to the imperatives of achieving the maximum result with the minimum of means. Necessarily, therefore, man becomes the means of this end that is production.

As a result, this contradiction remains "philosophical" and abstract also in a second sense: Without mincing words, it is because we cannot do anything about it. This situation is the inexorable result of a phase of technical development and ultimately even of the very nature of economics, "the reign of necessity." This is alienation in the Hegelian sense: Man has to lose himself first in order to find himself again—and to find himself again on another plane, after

having gone through purgatory. It is the reduction of the workday that will allow there to be a socialist organization of society, and it is the abolition of the wastefulness of the capitalist market that will make man free—*outside* of production.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, as we shall see, this philosophical conception is the *real* contradiction of capitalism, and the source of the crisis in the most down-to-earth and material sense of this term. In its most microscopic as well as its most large-scale aspects, the crisis of capitalism directly expresses the following fact: that man's situation and status *qua* producer under capitalism are contradictory and ultimately absurd. The capitalist rationalization of the relations of production is only rationalization in appearance. This huge pyramid of means ought to acquire its meaning from its ultimate end. But having become a goal in itself and detached from everything else, the ultimate end of increasing production for its own sake is absolutely irrational. Production is one of man's means, man is not one of the means of production. The irrationality of this ultimate end determines from one end to the other the entire capitalist production process; whatever rationality it might contain in the domain of means, when it is put in the service of an irrational end, it becomes irrational itself. But the principal one of these means is man himself. To make man completely a means of production signifies the transformation of the subject into an object, it signifies treating him as a thing in the domain of production. Whence we have a second irrational aspect, another concrete contradiction, insofar as this transformation of people into things, this reification, is in conflict with the very development of production, which is indeed the essence of capitalism and which cannot take place without also developing people.

But what thus appears as an *objective* and *impersonal* contradiction acquires its historical meaning only through its transformation into *human* and *social conflict*. It is the producers' permanent struggle against their reification that transforms what otherwise would remain a mere opposition between concepts into a crisis rending the entire organization of society. There is no crisis of capitalism resulting from the operation of "objective laws" or dialectical contradictions. Such a crisis exists only insofar as people revolt against the established rules. This revolt, inversely, begins as a revolt against the concrete conditions of production; it is therefore at this level that we must seek both the origin of and the model for the general crisis of the system.

### The Hour of Work

The contradiction of capitalism appears from the outset in the simple question of how capital and the worker relate to each other: What is an hour of work?

Through the labor contract the worker sells his labor power to the enterprise. But what is this labor power? Does the worker sell his "time"? But what is this "time"? The worker, of course, does not sell his mere presence. During a period when the workers were struggling to reduce the workday from twelve or fourteen hours, Marx asked, What is a workday? This meant: How many hours are there in a workday? But there is an even profounder question: What is an *hour* of

work? In other words, how much work is there in an hour? The labor contract can define the daily duration of work and the hourly wage—and therefore what the capitalist owes to the worker for an hour of work. But how much work does the worker owe to the capitalist for an hour? It is impossible to say. It is upon this sand that capitalist relations of production are built.

In the past, the mode and pace of work were set in an almost immutable fashion by natural conditions and inherited techniques, habit, and custom. Today, natural conditions and techniques are in a constant state of upheaval so as to accelerate production. The worker, however, has lost all interest in working except as it helps him to win his bread. Inevitably, therefore, he resists this attempt to accelerate his work pace. The content of an hour of work, the actual labor the worker has to furnish in an hour, thus becomes the object of a permanent conflict.

Now, in the capitalist universe there exists no rational criterion that would allow this conflict to be resolved. Whether the worker “loafs” or dies of exhaustion over his machine is neither “logical” nor “illogical.” The relation of forces between workers and capital alone can determine the pace of work under given conditions. Every real solution therefore represents a compromise, a truce based on the relation of forces existing at that moment. By its very essence such a truce is temporary. The relation of forces changes. Even if it does not change, the technical situation will be modified. The compromise that was arrived at so arduously starting from a given configuration of machinery, a particular type of manufacturing process, etc., collapses; in the new situation the previous set of norms no longer makes any sense. And thus conflict begins anew.

Nevertheless, in order to overcome this conflict as well as to be able to plan production in the enterprise, capitalism is obliged to search for an “objective,” “rational” basis for setting production norms. The essential element of this planning process is to be found in the labor time devoted to each operation. Insofar as production has not been completely automated, each unit of time always boils down in the last analysis to “human time,” in other words, to the output actually obtained where living labor continues to make itself felt. This truth remains concealed from the production engineers insofar as “depreciation on equipment,” for example, can appear (when the factory is not completely integrated) as an autonomous and irreducible element in cost computations. This, however, is only an optical illusion that is due to the fact that under the present structural setup, the engineer is obliged to take the part for the whole. The cost of equipment depreciation is nothing but the labor of workers who manufacture it or repair it (machinists). Hence, one cannot calculate, for example, a machine’s “optimal running speed”—which balances the labor cost of the worker utilizing it against the cost of “depreciation on equipment”—unless the actual efficiency of these machinists also is taken into account.

We will return later to this question, which is decisive for the “rationality” of capitalist production. It suffices to point out here two things. First, the inability to consider the entire production process beyond the accidental boundaries of the particular enterprise destroys at its base all pretension to “rationality” on the part of the capitalist organization; one is obliged to consider as irreducible

givens what are in reality a part of the problem to be resolved. Second, even on the scale of the individual enterprise, the capitalist management inevitably remains, as will be seen, at least partially in the dark about the real output and efficiency of different types of labor. This state of ignorance therefore also makes it impossible for this type of management to plan production in a rational manner.

Taylorism and all the methods of "scientific management" that flow from it claim either directly or indirectly to furnish such an "objective" basis. Postulating that there is only "one best way"<sup>5</sup> to accomplish each operation, they try to establish this "one best way" and to make it the criterion for how much output the worker should furnish. This "one best way" is to be discovered by breaking down each operation into a series of movements, the duration of which is to be measured, and by choosing, among the various types of movements carried out by various workers, the most "economic" ones. By adding together these "elementary times,"<sup>6</sup> one is supposed to be able to determine the normal amount of time required for the total operation. For each type of operation, we then would be able to tell the actual amount of labor an hour of clock time contains and thereby overcome the conflict over output. Ideally, this method ought to allow us even to eliminate supervisors, insofar as the latter are used to make sure that the workers furnish the maximum amount of labor possible: Paid according to the ratio between their output and the norm, workers would supervise themselves. One part of the conflicts over wages finally could be eliminated, since the actual wage would depend henceforth on the worker himself.

In fact, this method runs aground. Taylorism and the "scientific management" movement have resolved certain problems;<sup>7</sup> they have created many others and on the whole they have not permitted capitalism to get beyond its daily crisis in the area of production. Because of the bankruptcy of "scientific" rationalization, capitalism is constantly obliged to return to the empiricism of coercion pure and simple, and thereby to aggravate the conflict inherent in its mode of production, to heighten its anarchy, and to multiply its wastefulness.

### **The Theoretical Critique of Taylorism**

First of all there is an insurmountable gap between the postulates of the theoretical conception and the essential characteristics of the real situation in which this conception tries to assert itself. The "one best way" has no relation to the concrete reality of production. Its definition presupposes the existence of ideal conditions, conditions that are extremely far removed from the actual conditions the worker faces, such as problems relating to the quality of equipment and raw materials, the need to establish an uninterrupted flow of supplies, etc. — in short, it presupposes the complete elimination of all the "accidents" that often interrupt the course of production or give rise to unforeseen problems.<sup>8</sup>

But in particular, there are flaws immanent in the theoretical conception itself. From the physiological point of view, work is an expenditure of effort multiplied by a duration of time. This duration is measurable, but the expenditure

of effort is not (it involves a muscular component, a component of attentiveness, an intellectual component, etc.). "Time studies" can take into account only the duration of time. As for the rest, they confine themselves to "the subjective judgments or interpretations of the engineer responsible for the measurement or the practical calculations and this deprives the results of any scientific value."<sup>9</sup> But work is not only a physiological function; it is a total activity of the person who accomplishes it. The idea that there is "one best way" for each operation ignores the basic fact that each working individual can have and does have *his* manner of adapting himself to the job and of adapting it to himself. What appears to the scientific manager as an absurd, time-wasting movement has its own logic in the personal psychosomatic makeup of the worker in question which leads him to follow *his own* "best way" to complete a given operation. The worker tends to resolve the problems his work poses for him in a manner that corresponds to his overall way of being. His gestures are not like a set of toy blocks where one could pull out one cube and replace it with a "better" one while leaving everything else in place. A gesture that is apparently "more rational" and "more economical" can be much more difficult for some particular worker than the way of doing things that he has invented for himself and that thereby expresses his organic adaptation to this hands-on struggle with machinery and materials that constitutes the work process. Such a gesture is carried out more rapidly *because* another one is carried out more slowly; merely adding together the minimum amounts of time used by different workers is a glaring absurdity, but applying a standard "normal performance rate" to all the successive phases of an operation carried out by the same worker is an even greater one. The worker's entire set of gestures is not a garment that might be replaced with another. A human being cannot spend two-thirds of his waking life carrying out movements that are foreign to him and that correspond to nothing within him. Tacking "rational" gestures onto the worker in this way is not simply inhuman; in actuality, it is impossible, it never can be fully realized. Indeed, even for the gestures that workers make up themselves, and even for each worker taken individually, there is no "one best way"; experience shows that the same worker alternatively uses several methods of carrying out the same job, if only to relieve the monotony of his work.<sup>10</sup>

### Critique of the Theoretical Critique

The idea that labor is only a succession of elementary movements of a measurable duration, that this duration of time is their sole significant feature, makes sense only if we accept the following postulate: The worker in the capitalist factory should be completely transformed into an appendage of the machinery. As with a machine, one determines the movements that are "rational" and those that are not; one retains the former and eliminates the latter. As with a machine, the total time to complete an operation is merely the sum of the "elementary times" of the movements into which one can, mechanically, resolve this operation. Like the machine, the worker does not have and should not have any per-

sonal traits; more precisely, as with the machine, the worker's "personal traits" are considered and treated as irrational accidents to be eliminated.<sup>11</sup>

The theoretical critique of Taylorism, in particular as it is conducted by modern industrial sociologists,<sup>12</sup> lies essentially in showing that this view is absurd, that man is not a machine, that Taylor was mechanistic, etc. But this is only a half-truth. The whole truth is that the reality of modern production, where hundreds of millions of individuals spend their lives in enterprises dispersed all around the world, is precisely this very "absurdity." Taylor, from this point of view, did not invent anything at all; he merely systematized and brought to its logical conclusion what has always been the logic of capitalist organization, that is to say, the capitalist logic of organization. What is astonishing is not that "mechanistic" and absurd ideas were able to germinate in the heads of the ideologues and organizational managers of industry. These ideas merely give expression to the peculiar reality of capitalism. The astonishing thing is that in the sphere of production, capitalism *almost* has succeeded in transforming man into an appendage of the machinery, that the reality of modern production is only this very endeavor renewed each day, each instant. This endeavor fails only to the exact extent that in the sphere of production people refuse to be treated as machines. Every critique of the inhuman character of capitalist production that does not take as its point of departure the *practical* critique of this inhumanity that the workers themselves bring to bear in the sphere of production through their daily struggle against capitalist methods ultimately is merely literary moralizing.

### The Workers' Practical Critique

The root of the failure of "scientific management" methods is the bitter opposition that the workers have shown from the very outset. And of course, the first manifestation of this resistance is the permanent struggle that sets workers against the time-study men. It is on the terrain of this struggle that in every factory the workers immediately realize a spontaneous association. For obvious reasons, the actions that are the expression of this spontaneous association are little known, but their import and universality become clear once we listen to an author who is familiar with what goes on inside a factory.<sup>13</sup>

The first outcome of this resistance obviously is that all semblance of "objective" justification for such "elementary times" is destroyed. The conflict between workers and management is transposed onto the plane of determining these time periods. This process of determination presupposes a certain degree of collaboration on the workers' part. The latter refuse to do so. Management might have been able to dispense with this collaboration if its techniques were unchanging; in that case, little by little it would have been able to set down for good norms representing the maximum amount of output that can be extorted from the worker under a given set of conditions. These techniques, however, are constantly changing; norms have to be reset, and conflict begins anew.

Speaking of an enterprise in which there is a methods department that

“brings up to date” the times allotted to workers, a right-thinking author writes:

Surveys are constantly being brought up to date to take account of:

- a) rapid technical development: improvements in processes and in the machinery manufactured.
- b) the large number of operations.

The allotted time is frequently revised and should normally be agreed upon by the workers. Experience shows that this is not the case and that these revisions are the cause of frequent disputes capable of leading to local strike action.<sup>14</sup>

As the norms cannot be put into effect or even established without at least a certain degree of grudging acceptance on the part of the workers, and as the latter do not cooperate, the exploiters' first counterresponse is to establish them with the collaboration of a minority that they buy off. Here is the ultimate meaning of Stakhanovism: It is to establish monstrously exaggerated norms based on the output of certain individuals who are given a privileged position and who are placed under conditions that bear no relation to the current conditions of the actual production process.<sup>15</sup> A twofold result thus is aimed at: (1) to create within the proletariat a privileged stratum that is a direct support for the exploiters and that is helpful in dissolving working-class solidarity precisely on the terrain of their resistance to increases in output; and (2) to utilize the norms thus established, if not as such, at least in order to shorten the times allotted for the mass of production workers. But Stakhanovism is not the invention of Stalin; its true father is Taylor. In his first “experiment,” at Bethlehem Steel Company, after a “scientific” motion study was conducted, Taylor set a norm four times higher than the average output theretofore achieved, and he “proved” three years later with a specially chosen Dutch worker that this norm “could have been realized.” Nevertheless, when one tried to extend this system to seventy-five other workers on the gang after having taught them the “rational” method of working, it was discovered that only one worker in eight could keep up with the norm.

Consequently, the problem was posed anew, for norms established based upon the output of a few “rate-busters” or a few Stakhanovites cannot be extended to the rest of the workers. The Russian bureaucracy's ultimate abandonment of Stakhanovism is the glaring admission of the bankruptcy of this method.

In fact, management's real counterresponse—which at the same time wipes out all of Taylorism's scientific pretensions and closes the discussion from this standpoint—is that it itself sabotages every “rational” employment of scientific management methods and reverts to arbitrarily imposing norms, backed up with coercion. Each year, hundreds and thousands of books and articles appear on the topic of “scientific management,” “time studies,” etc.; hundreds and thousands of individuals are “trained” to apply these methods. Simplifying the



issue but remaining faithful to the essence of the actual situation, we can state that all this is an enormous masquerade that has nothing to do with the setting of norms as it is practiced in a real industrial setting. The objective basis for establishing these norms essentially comes from fraud, spying, and assorted types of pressure.

Workers who think of the time-study men as policemen refer not only to the *content* but to the *methods* of their “work” as well. In the Renault factories, the setting of norms often occurs in the following fashion: Unknown to the workers, a new time-study man is sent to walk around the shops and to note while passing by unnoticed the amounts of time required for various operations (one can easily imagine the true value of the “times” noted in this way). With the aid of these “times,” the time-study man mixes up a concoction—the new “norm”—which he then will haggle over with the supervisor of the shop in question. The final norm is the outcome of this process of haggling. One or two weeks later, a ritual performance is enacted in the shop: The time-study man comes to time the workers, starts his stopwatch, bustles about, pronounces some cabalistic words, and then disappears. Finally, the result is proclaimed—which had been decided upon in advance.<sup>16</sup>

In another factory,

In September, 1954, the Methods Department timed all the operations carried out in the assembly shop; the time-study engineer, questioned by the head of the workshop and a delegate, stated that he was carrying out a revision of the operating methods shown on the chart. . . . On December 29, 1954, new times, representing an average reduction of about 20% in allotted time, were notified to the shop delegates. . . . The workers concerned stopped work; the arguments put forward by their delegates were as follows:

1. The delegates and the workers had been misinformed about the purpose of the time-study operations. . . .<sup>17</sup>

If management’s agents are forced to hide like thieves in management’s own shops, we can definitely say that all discussion about “rationalizing” efficiency and norms is nothing but mystificatory drivel. In fact, in such a situation, norms express merely management’s *Diktat*—the enforcement of which depends on the workers’ capacity for resistance.

Almost nothing is changed in this situation when the trade unions intervene. In theory, the trade unions’ line is that they are “opposed to all modifications of the norms and speed of production, unless these modifications are justified by improvements in the equipment or changes in the manufacturing processes.” In reality, management constantly modifies its equipment and its manufacturing processes precisely in order to accelerate the work pace. Hence we see that the trade unions end up being opposed to modifications of norms in all cases . . . except, it turns out, when it is really important. How indeed can it be judged whether or not some particular equipment change or alteration of the manufacturing process “justifies” a change in the norms? Management constantly relies upon this inability to make a judgment in order to cut down on any “slack

time,” and it does so under the pretext of “technical modifications” that are in fact fictional. An American worker put it this way: “They’ll tear a machine to pieces to change something to cut a price.”<sup>18</sup>

Once the norm is set, one’s problems are far from being over. Management is assured of the quantity of the workers’ output but not its quality. Except for the simplest of jobs, this is a decisive question. Rushed by norms that are difficult to adhere to, the worker naturally will have a tendency to make up for it on the quality of his work. Quality control over manufactured parts becomes a new source of conflicts.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, products cannot be manufactured without greater or lesser depreciation on the equipment—and generally, it is easier to increase output by depreciating one’s equipment to an abnormally high degree. Management’s only response lies in setting up additional supervisory controls—whence there arise additional conflicts.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the problem of *effective output* remains completely open. We will see how workers succeed in emptying a set of norms of its content and even in turning it against management.

### **The Collective Reality of Production and the Individualized Organization of the Capitalist Enterprise**

In an abstract form, the contradiction of capitalism appears at the outset in production’s molecular element: the individual worker’s work hour. The *content* of the work hour has directly opposite meanings for capital and for the worker. For the former, its meaning is that of maximum output; for the latter, it is the output corresponding to the amount of effort he thinks is fair.

But in modern production the individual worker is an abstraction. To a degree which was unknown under other historical forms of production, capitalist production is a collective form of production. Not only in society, but in the factory and in each shop, the jobs performed by one person are dependent upon the jobs performed by everyone else. This dependence takes on more and more direct forms as its scope continually widens and as it comes to cover all aspects of the operations of production. No longer is it merely the case that a worker cannot carry out some operation on some components if unfinished components are not provided at the required speed; the worker must also be provided with tools, power, “services” (tool setups, stock management, etc.). Furthermore, every aspect of an operation is directly interdependent with every aspect of all the operations preceding it as well as with those that will follow. Indeed, on a production line and, still more, on an assembly line, individual rhythms and gestures are only the materialization of a total rhythm that preexists them, controls them, and gives them a meaning. The true subject of modern production is not the individual; it is, to various degrees, a *collectivity* of workers.

Now, capitalism simultaneously develops this collective reality of modern production to the extreme and, in its mode of organization, fiercely repudiates it. At the same time that it absorbs individuals into ever-larger enterprises, assigning

them jobs whose interdependence increases every day, capitalism claims to be concerned only with, and wants to be concerned only with, the individual worker. This is not just some contradiction on the level of ideas—although that too exists and manifests itself in a thousand ways. It is a real contradiction. Capitalism is perpetually trying to retransform the producers into a cloud of individual dust particles lacking any organic tie among themselves, yet management clusters this cloud of dust together at convenient spots on the mechanical Moloch, according to the “logic” of this total machine. Capitalist “rationalization” begins by being, and remains to the end, a meticulous regulation of the relationship between the individual worker and the machine or the segment of the total machine on which he works. This, as we have seen, is in keeping with the very essence of capitalist production. Work is reduced here to a series of meaningless gestures going on at a frantic pace, during the course of which the worker’s exploitation and alienation unremittingly tend to increase. For the workers, this work is a kind of forced labor to which they put up both individual and collective resistance. As a counterresponse to this resistance, capitalism has at its disposal only economic and mechanical forms of coercion. Payment in terms of achieved output is supposed to furnish the worker with motivations capable of making him accept this inhuman situation. But this payment has meaning only in relation to the individual worker, whose gestures have been taken apart and timed, whose work has been defined, measured, monitored, etc.

Thus, this method comes into violent conflict with the reality of collectivized and socialized production. Dissolving the organic ties between the individual and his group and transforming the producers into an anonymous mass of proletarians, capitalism is destroying the social groups that preceded it, the corporation or the village. Grouped into enterprises, these proletarians cannot live and coexist without resocializing themselves, at a different level; they are resocialized under the new conditions created by the situation in which they are placed within the capitalist world and which, by becoming resocialized, they transform. In the factory, capitalism is constantly trying to reduce them to mechanical and economic molecules, to isolate them, to make them gravitate around the total machine under the hypothesis that they obey only the dictates of economic motivation, this Newtonian law of the capitalist universe. And each time, these attempts are shattered when confronted with the perpetually renewed process through which individuals are socialized in the world of production—a process upon which capitalism itself is constantly obliged to rely.

The spontaneous constitution of elementary collective units within the framework imposed by capitalism is the first aspect this process of socializing the workers takes on. These *elementary groups*<sup>21</sup> constitute a firm’s basic social units. Capitalism clusters individuals together within a team or a shop, pretending to keep them isolated from each other and linking them solely through the intermediary of production processes. In fact, as soon as workers are brought together to do a job, social relations are established among them, a collective attitude toward the job, supervisors, management, and other workers develops. The first facet of this socialization process on the level of the elementary group

is to be found in the fact that the workers who make it up spontaneously tend to organize themselves, to cooperate with each other, and to deal with the problems raised by the work they have in common and with their relationships to the rest of the factory and to management. Just as an individual, when confronted with a job, organizes himself—half-consciously, half-unconsciously—in order to carry it out, so, on a different level, a number of workers, when confronted with a job, will tend to organize themselves—half-consciously, half-unconsciously—in order to carry it through, to give some order to the relations among the individual jobs of its members, and to make it into a whole corresponding to the goal in question. It is to this type of organization that elementary groups correspond.

Elementary groups of workers include a varying, but generally small, number of persons. These groups are based on the direct and permanent contacts established among their members and on the interdependent character of the jobs these people perform. Workers in a workshop may form one or many elementary groups, depending upon the size of the shop, the nature and degree of unity of the jobs they carry out, but also as a function of other factors related to personal, ideological, and other kinds of attraction and repulsion. Often, but not necessarily, elementary groups coincide with the “crews” designated in the official organization of the shop.<sup>22</sup> They are the living nuclei of productive activity—as elementary groups of another type are the living nuclei of all social activities at different levels. Within them we find already manifested the workers’ self-managerial attitude, their tendency to organize themselves in order to resolve the problems raised by their work and by their relations with the rest of society.

### **Elementary Groups and Industrial Sociology**

Bourgeois academic sociology has brought to light the fact that in reality modern production relies for the most part on this spontaneous association of workers into elementary groups, or more exactly on the self-transformation of fortuitous assemblages of individuals into organic collectivities.<sup>23</sup> Undoubtedly, modern industrial sociology has made a decisive contribution to the recognition of the fundamental importance of this phenomenon, and concurrently, to the critique of the capitalist organization of human relations in production, starting out from this point of view. This contribution is totally undermined, however, by the general outlook of its authors just as the critique of the capitalist enterprise that follows therefrom only results in a utopian and impotent reformism.

The perspective through which industrial sociologists most of the time view elementary groups is “psychologistic.” Like all human beings, workers tend to become socialized, to enter into reciprocal relationships, to form “bands.” Their motivation to work is constituted starting from their belonging to a “band” and not starting from economic considerations. The “work ethic” depends on this feeling of belonging, on the ties that unite the individual and his group. The fundamental flaw of the capitalist organization of production is that it ignores these phenomena. From its own point of view management is wrong to arbi-

trarily transfer workers, to assign a new trainee to a given crew without worrying about the relationships that might arise between him and others, and more generally, to be unaware of the reality belonging to the elementary group. This regrettable lack of awareness is to be attributed to the erroneous theoretical conceptions (those that Mayo<sup>24</sup> encapsulates under the name of the “rabble hypothesis” and that we prefer to designate henceforth in this text by the term “molecular hypothesis”<sup>25</sup>) that have predominated for some time now. The critique of this conception ought to lead production managers to change their attitude toward the problem of human relations in the enterprise, thus allowing actual conflicts and wastefulness to be eliminated.

The paternalistic and idealistic character of these solutions, their thoroughly utopian content, and their laborious naïveté are obvious. Management’s theoretical conceptions do not determine the relations between management and the workers in the capitalist firm. These conceptions merely give abstract expression to the inescapable necessities management faces *qua external management* and *qua exploitative management*. The molecular hypothesis is a necessary product of capitalism and will disappear only when it does. From the practical point of view, when faced with the anarchy that characterizes both the capitalist enterprise and its relations with the market (or with the “plan”), management has other, more pressing matters than to be bothered with its employees’ personal feelings toward each other. At the very most, a new bureaucratic department responsible for “human relations” may be created within the managerial apparatus. If it takes its role seriously, this department will be in permanent conflict with the exigencies of the “production” managers, and it will be reduced thereby to a decorative role; otherwise, it will put its “sociological” and “psychoanalytical” techniques at the disposal of the factory’s system of coercion.<sup>26</sup>

But the main point lies elsewhere. The workers’ spontaneous association in elementary groups does not express the tendency of individuals to form groups in general. It is simultaneously a regrouping for the purposes of *production* and a regrouping for the purposes of *struggle*. It is because they have to resolve among themselves the problems involved in organizing their work (whose various aspects are mutually interrelated) that workers necessarily form elementary collectivities not mentioned on the organizational chart of any enterprise. It is because their situation in production creates among them a community of interests, attitudes, and objectives irremediably opposed to those of management that, at the most elementary level, workers spontaneously associate together to resist, to defend themselves, and to struggle.

To invite management to recognize these elementary groups means to invite it to commit suicide.<sup>27</sup> For these groups are constituted from the start *against* management, not only because they struggle to make their interests prevail in irremediable opposition to its interests, but also because the very foundation of their existence, their primary objective, is the management [*gestion*] of their own activity. The group tends to organize the activity of its members, to define the norms relating to how much they should exert themselves and how they should behave. All this signifies a radical challenge to the very existence of a separate

management [*direction*]. The inability of “elementary group” sociologists to recognize clearly the consequences of this state of affairs constitutes the main stumbling block for this type of sociology.<sup>28</sup>

### The Informal Organization of the Enterprise

This challenge indeed goes far beyond the bounds of the elementary group. On the one hand, these groups tend to put themselves in contact with each other; on the other hand and more generally, contacts and relationships are established between individuals and groups throughout the enterprise, *alongside* and *in opposition* to the official organization. Along with modern industrial sociology, we are learning that the enterprise has a double structure and leads, so to speak, a double life. There is, on the one hand, its *formal organization*, the one represented on organizational charts, the one whose ruling summits proceed along the lines of these charts in order to allocate and define the work of each person, to keep informed, to send orders, or to assign responsibilities. To this formal organization there is opposed in reality the *informal organization*, whose activities are carried out and supported by individuals and groups at all levels of the hierarchical pyramid according to the requirements of their work, the imperatives of productive efficiency, and the necessities of their struggle against exploitation.<sup>29</sup> Correlatively, there is what indeed might be called the formal production process and the real production process. The first includes what *ought to* happen in the enterprise according to the plans, diagrams, regulations, methods for transmitting information, etc., established by management. The second is the one that actually is enacted. It often bears little relation to the first.

The failure of the individualist type of capitalist organization therefore goes far beyond the elementary group. Cooperation tends to be carried out alongside and in opposition to this type of organization. But what is most important is that this opposition is not the opposition of “theory” and “practice,” of “beautiful schemes on paper” and “reality.” It has a social content, a content having to do with struggle. The formal organization of the factory coincides as a matter of fact with the bureaucratic managerial apparatus’s system of organization. Its nodal points, its articulations are those of this apparatus. For in the official diagram of the enterprise, the whole enterprise is “contained” in its managerial apparatus; people exist only as provinces of power for those in charge. Beginning with the summit of what is properly called “management” (president-CEO in the firms of Western countries, the factory director in the Russian factory) and passing through the various offices, departments, and technical services of the enterprise, the bureaucratic managerial apparatus terminates with the shop foremen, supervisors, and team leaders. Formally, it even completely encompasses the executives—who in the official diagram are only clusters around each foreman or team leader.

The managerial apparatus pretends to be the only organization in the enterprise, the sole source of all order and of any kind of order. In fact, it creates as

much disorder as order and more conflicts than it is capable of resolving. Facing it is the enterprise's informal organization, which includes the elementary groups of workers, various modes of lateral connections [*liaison transversale*] among these groups, similar associations among individuals in the managerial apparatus, and lots of isolated individuals at various levels who in extreme cases only have among themselves the relationships that the official diagram assumes they have. These two organizations, however, are truncated. The formal organization is riddled with holes by the base, it never succeeds in actually encompassing the immense mass of executants. The informal organization is thwarted by the heights; beyond the elementary groups of executants, it actually includes the individuals formally belonging to the managerial apparatus only when this apparatus starts to grow to enormous proportions, when the division of labor is pushed even further and is accompanied by further collectivization, and, finally, when the work of the lower echelons of the managerial apparatus is transformed into merely another form of executant work, thus creating even within this apparatus a category of executants that struggles against the summits.<sup>30</sup>

The formal organization, therefore, is not a facade; in its reality it coincides with the managerial stratum. The informal organization is not an excrescence appearing in the interstices of the formal organization; it tends to represent a different mode of operation of the enterprise, centered around the real situation of the executants. The direction, the dynamic, and the outlook of the two organizations are entirely opposite—and opposed on a social terrain that ultimately coincides with that of the struggle between directors and executants.

For a struggle takes place between these two modes of organization, which is in all respects permanent and which ends up becoming identical with the enterprise's two social poles. This is what industrial sociologists, who usually just criticize the formal schema as absurd, too often forget. This situation is analogous to the one we discussed apropos of Taylorism, and the shortcomings of a purely theoretical critique are the same here. The managerial apparatus is constantly struggling to impose its scheme of organization; the absurdity of this schema is not theoretical, it is the reality of capitalism. What is astonishing is not the theoretical absurdity of the schema but the fact that capitalism *almost* succeeds in transforming people into points on an organizational chart. It fails only to the exact extent that people struggle against this transformation.

This struggle begins at the level of the elementary group, but it extends throughout the entire enterprise through the very need to produce and to defend against management; ultimately, it embraces the entire mass of executants. Its extension is founded on several successive moments. The position of each elementary group is essentially identical to that of the others; each of these groups inevitably is led to cooperate with the rest of the enterprise;<sup>31</sup> and ultimately they all tend to merge in a *class*, the class of executants, defined by a community of situation, function, interests, attitude, mentality. Now, industrial sociology denies deep down this class perspective that verbally it accepts. It speaks of elementary groups as a universal phenomenon; but while it is willing to compare them with each other, it refuses to add them together. Nevertheless, it does more than just add them together since it recognizes in them the subject matter and at

the same time the principle of the enterprise's informal organization. But it keeps these two moments—the identity of elementary groups throughout the enterprise and their cooperation—separate and does not venture to ask itself why there is a passage from one to the other. It therefore renders itself incapable of seeing the polarization of the enterprise between directors and executives and the struggle that sets them against each other, all the more so as it includes under the rubric of informal organization phenomena whose significations are radically different, such as when it compares the tendency of the executives to form their own type of organization to the formation of cliques and clans within the ruling bureaucracy. This actual refusal to place the firm's problems within a *class* perspective (and the process of class formation can be seen most vividly through an analysis of the enterprise) makes it sink into theoretical abstraction as well as get lost in “practical solutions,” the utopian character of which is based precisely on the imaginary suppression of the reality of classes.

We must add that Marxism admits of an abstraction that is almost symmetrical to the preceding one insofar as it has limited itself to immediately positing the concept of class and to directly opposing the proletariat and capitalism while neglecting the basic articulations within the enterprise and among the human groups within the enterprise. It thus has prevented itself from seeing the proletariat's vital process of class formation, of self-creation as the outcome of a permanent struggle that begins within production. It also has prevented itself from relating the proletariat's organizational problems in capitalist society to this process. And finally, insofar as the primary content of this struggle is the workers' tendency to manage their own work, it has prevented itself from posing workers' management as the central feature of the socialist program and from drawing from it all the possible implications. To the abstract concept of the proletariat corresponds the abstract concept of socialism as nationalization and planning, whose sole concrete content ultimately is revealed to be the totalitarian dictatorship of the representatives of this abstraction—of the bureaucratic party.

### **The Contradictions Proper to Management's Bureaucratic Apparatus**

To achieve its own ends, the capitalist organization of production is obliged to pursue the fragmentation of production tasks and the atomization of the producers *ad infinitum*. With respect to the end in view—the total subjugation of people—this process culminates in a double failure and leads to tremendous waste. At the same time, however, it gives rise very sharply to a second problem: that of how to recompose these operations of production into a whole. Individual jobs, supposedly defined, measured, monitored, etc., have to be integrated anew into a unified whole [*ensemble*], outside of which they are meaningless. Now, this reintegration can be accomplished in the capitalist factory only by the same authority following the same method of decomposition that “preceded” it, by a managerial apparatus separated from the producers that aims at subjecting them to capital's requirements and that treats them to this end as things, as fragments



of the mechanical universe that are comparable to all others. Logically and technically, reintegration is only the flip side of decomposition; neither one can be carried out or have any meaning without the other. Economically and socially, the realization of the goals pursued during the phase of decomposition is impossible if these goals do not also predominate over the process of reintegration: The ground taken from the producers during the phase of decomposition could not be given back to them during the phase of reintegration without putting back into question the very structure of the relations of exploitation.<sup>32</sup>

As a consequence, the managerial apparatus will try to resolve the problem of reintegrating jobs *itself*, thereby denying *deep down* the collective character of production that it is obliged to grant on a formal level. For the managerial apparatus, the collectivity of workers is not a collectivity but a collection. Their labor is not a social process whose every part is in a constantly changing interdependence with all the others and with the whole, and whose every moment perpetually contains the seeds of something new; it is a *sum* of parts that someone from the outside can decompose and recombine at will, like a game of blocks, and that can change only insofar as something else is introduced into it. For it is only upon this condition that the command post of this collective activity could be transposed outside this activity with no repercussions. It is only upon this condition that exactly what one has put into its parts could be rediscovered in the whole, without losses or gains.

The managerial apparatus thus is obliged to take everything upon itself. In theory, all acts of production have to be doubled ideally and a priori within the bureaucratic apparatus; everything that involves a decision has to be worked out in advance—or after the fact—outside the operations of production themselves. Execution has to become pure execution, and symmetrically, management has to become absolute and perfect. Of course, such a situation never can be realized; but the “organizational” activity of the managerial apparatus is dominated by the necessary pursuit of this chimera, which puts it up against insoluble contradictions.

First of all, the very concept of a *perfect, separate management* is contradictory. A perfect, separate management is possible only if its complementary pole, a *perfect, separate execution*, also is possible. Now, perfect, separate execution is nonsensical. As human activity—as activity that cannot be conferred upon automated machinery—execution necessarily involves the element of self-direction; it is not and never can be execution pure and simple. Man is not and cannot be a perfect, separate executant, and this singular attempt to make him one creates in him both a situation and reactions that produce the opposite effect. This contrary situation is established because the suppression of the faculties of and capacities for self-direction (which are indispensable for tasks of “execution”) are precisely what make him a bad executant. And these contrary reactions are created because man always tends in one fashion or another to take on the direction of his own activity and he revolts against this expropriation of his self-directing activity to which he is subjected. During the historical stages that preceded capitalism, this contradiction remained abstract and merely potential, basically because the form and content of productive activities were

fixed once and for all. But capitalist production, which is in constant upheaval, is continually obliged to call upon the human faculties of its executants in order to function. In this way the contradiction becomes an active and actual one, since the way the system functions leads it to affirm two things at once: "The worker should confine himself to the pure and simple execution of the tasks prescribed to him"; and, "The worker should bring about the end in view whatever the real conditions and available means and no matter how far these depart from theoretical conditions and means."

This gap cannot be bridged. Perfect, separate management can be conceived of only as the organ promulgating the perfect plan, which obviously cannot exist. Such a perfect plan would imply that management has absolute foresight and exhaustive information, both of which are impossible in themselves, two times impossible for a separate management, and three times impossible for a management that exploits the producers. Of course, modern industry tends to "rationalize" the set of conditions, means, and objects of production, and this rationalization is presented as the elimination of chance, of the unforeseen, and as the creation of standardized conditions for the production process as a whole. Under such conditions, it ought to be possible, after a period of trial and error and through successive approximations, to reach a "point of rest," after which production finally could unfold according to plan. But this would imply that from this moment on the conditions, methods, instruments, and objects of production were unalterably fixed. Now, the very essence of modern industry is perpetual change. From a large-scale point of view, one stage of technical development hardly has arrived at a level of "consolidation" when a new stage comes crashing onto the scene. From a small-scale point of view—which is just as important in the everyday life of the factory—"consolidation" is never achieved; "small" changes continually are being made in the materials, the machinery, the objects manufactured, and the ways people and machines are arranged (and these changes are precisely the expression of this process of "rationalization"). Thus, the plan has to be perpetually modified, and there never is time perfectly to adapt it to the unfolding of the production process.

Indeed, "standardization" remains an ideal norm that is never realized, for both social and "natural" reasons. Everything used at any given stage of the production process already is the result of previous industrial labor. In theory, this result, this product—whether we are talking about raw materials or a machine or a detachable part—is supposed to conform to a rigorous definition, to precise specifications of size, shape, quality, and so on within set margins of tolerance. It suffices that any one of these material or ideal components not correspond in reality to its theoretical definition for the plan not to be able to be put into effect as is; this does not mean, of course, that production collapses or even that there is necessarily any significant damage—but it implies that only the vital intervention of real people can serve as a substitute for some now out-of-date directive and can adapt on the spot the available means—which are different from the theoretical ones—to the end in view.

That all the components of any job are the result of a previous job signifies that as soon as the actual results of this job deviate at a given stage from the

“theoretical” results, this gap has repercussions in one fashion or another upon the subsequent stages of the manufacturing process. Now, gaps of this kind are absolutely unavoidable in capitalist production, not only because the *exploited* executant is not interested in the result of his work and therefore often turns in “made up” results (which go along with a whole gamut of means for struggling against the factory’s “inspectors”), but also because the *compartmentalized* executant does not know and by definition should not know what is important and what is not important in what he is doing. All specifications that are set for him by the production directives he receives seem to be of equal importance (with allowed margins of tolerance). In fact they are not, either in the absolute or from the point of view of possibly making up for some gap without difficulties arising at a subsequent stage in the production process. Inasmuch as the executant, pressed by time restrictions, cannot handle everything at once, he will take shortcuts at random. For its part, the planning department cannot establish which aspects are truly important and which ones are not: On the one hand, it does not itself know which ones are important, for the establishment of such a hierarchy results from *actual practice* within an industrial setting from which it is, by definition, separated; on the other hand, its role is to present all directives as equally and absolutely important. Thus, by rendering an intelligent execution of tasks impossible, the methods of a separate managerial stratum themselves lead toward their own defeat.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, there is always an unforeseen “natural” element, even under the conditions of large-scale modern industry. Even materials manufactured under the best possible conditions present specific, unanticipated problems that must be compensated for in an equally unforeseen manner as they are worked upon. Even electronic computers, which are manufactured not under industrial conditions but under laboratory conditions, break down or go haywire for unknown reasons.<sup>34</sup> At each new stage, modern industry stretches to the limit its exploitation of the possibilities of knowledge and of matter; during each new period, it tends to work at the edge of the known and the feasible. This continuous displacement of its frontiers signifies that it can never comfortably remain within the regions it has already fully explored. A new territory has hardly been opened up when it must already be exploited under the conditions of mass production. Its means expand at a dizzying rate—but so do its objectives and manufacturing requirements. Instruments become finer and finer and more and more precise—but at the same time the limits of tolerance become narrower and narrower. In the past, the “unforeseen,” the “irrational,” and the “accidental” consisted of a cleft in the steel bar; today it can lie in infinitesimal irregularities in the chemical composition of molecules. It is not the degree of matter’s resistance to man that is diminishing, it is the line on which this resistance becomes effective that is being displaced—so that the gap between theory and reality can always be filled in only by practice, only by man’s simultaneously rational and concrete intervention. But this practice itself is constantly being elevated to a higher level, and it presupposes that the individual’s ever more highly developed capabilities—which are absolutely incompatible with the role of a pure and simple executant—will be put to work.

These are the reasons why the reality of production always deviates in a more or less appreciable manner from the plan and from production directives—and why this gap can be filled only by means of the practice, the invention, the creativity of the mass of executants. Each time that a new manufacturing process is introduced or a new product model is to be manufactured, and after the factory's various departments and engineers have spent months or years developing and "perfecting" the process or product in question, weeks or months will pass before production begins to flow in a somewhat satisfactory manner. Car drivers know that when a factory "launches" a new model, the cars produced during the first few months generally have serious defects.<sup>35</sup> And yet, their "prototype" had been tested for years, they had driven it in the Sahara and in Greenland, etc. But the time that has elapsed between the debut of the new manufactured product and the rolling-out of nearly satisfactory copies is the time needed for the mass of the factory's executants as a whole to give concrete form to initial manufacturing directives under real work conditions, to fill in the holes in the production plan, to resolve unforeseen problems, to adapt the manufacturing process to their own needs in their defense against exploitation (for example, to "make do" with the blueprint "specs" they are given), etc. Equilibrium between the production plan, the real state of the factory from the viewpoint of what is possible within the manufacturing process and the workers' struggle against exploitation thus is attained—until a new modification is introduced.

Management, of course, is "conscious" in general of these gaps between the production plan and what really goes on in the factory, and in principle it is supposed to fill them in itself. In practice, this obviously is not achievable: If each time something went wrong it was necessary to stop everything and ask for instructions back up the hierarchical chain of command, the factory would accomplish only a small portion of its production goals. Let it be said in passing that just because management is forced to tolerate the indispensable initiatives of the executants does not make the latter's role any easier. The managerial apparatus is both jealous of its prerogatives and completely fearful of its responsibilities; as much as it can, it will avoid tackling a question unless it is "covered," but it will harshly reproach its subordinates for having done so themselves. If the initiative succeeds, it will merely grumble, and then will try above all to grab the credit itself; if the initiative fails, it will deal with them severely.<sup>36</sup> For the executant, the ideal attitude is for him to take initiatives that are really effective while making it seem like he is following all the official directives—though this is not always easy. The factory thus comes to constitute in places a double world—where people make it seem like they are doing one thing while doing another.

Both the foresight required for planning and the need for ongoing readjustment of the plan to a constantly evolving reality pose the problem of how to obtain *information* about what is going on in production. This problem quickly becomes insoluble for a bureaucratic managerial apparatus. The ultimate source of all information is the executants who are constantly engaged in the battle for production. Now, these people do not collaborate in the process; not only do they not

necessarily inform management about the situation, but very often they are led into a tacit conspiracy to hide the real situation from management. The managerial apparatus can react to this only by creating special organs for obtaining information—which quickly run up against the same difficulty, since they too have to obtain original information from the outside. The conspiracy surrounding the obtainment of information indeed is not limited to executives. The managerial apparatus itself participates in it. In fact, this is an essential aspect of the activity of its members. They make up the results of their own activity or the activity of the sector for which they are responsible. Their fate, the fate of their clan or their department depends upon it.<sup>37</sup>

Obtaining information, however, is not simply the gathering of “facts.” It already is their *choice*, but it is also and much more their *elaboration*, the disentangling of the relationships and perspectives that tie facts together. This is impossible outside a conceptual framework, therefore outside a set of organized ideas, therefore outside a theory (even if it remains unconscious). Consequently, all information the managerial apparatus may have at its disposal is undermined by its theory of society—or of industrial reality. This is plainly apparent when we consider the bureaucratic apparatus that runs the entire society—the State or bureaucratic party. To run society presupposes that one knows it, and to know society signifies that one has an adequate theoretical conception of it. But today’s leaders can try to grasp social reality only by subordinating it to absurd schemata. The same is true of their ideologists. Sometimes these ideologists plan out the operations of society, using the functioning of a mechanism as their model; at other times, when disheartened by the failure of this absurd attempt at comparison, they take refuge in irrationalism, the accidental and the arbitrary. We will encounter these problems again later.

The ruling apparatus of the enterprise is faced with the same questions and the same impossible options. The reality it needs to know is the reality of production. The latter is first and last a human reality. The most important facts are those that concern the situation, the activity, and the fate of people in the production process. Obviously, it is impossible to know these facts from the outside. Moreover, management does not bother itself very much about them. To the extent that it is obliged to worry about them, however, it can do so only by considering them as external facts, by transforming them into mechanical entities capable of being observed—in short, by destroying their very nature. In management’s eyes, consequently, the worker either does not exist at all or else he exists only as a system of nerves and muscles capable of carrying out a certain quantity of gestures—gestures that can be increased in proportion to the amount of money he is promised. This entirely imaginary view of the worker is the basis for the “knowledge” of the reality of production that management possesses. In the manager’s very gaze is incorporated, through a process of construction, the negation of the inherent [*propre*] reality of the object he claims to be looking at, for recognition of this inherent reality would imply, conversely, that the manager denies himself *qua* manager.

This situation hardly is modified at all when the crude old methods and the schema of “molecules irresistibly attracted by money” are abandoned in favor of

more modern conceptions and the discoveries of industrial sociology. Only the nature of the “laws” supposed to rule people and their relations changes; the basic attitude remains the same. It no longer is assumed that the worker is capable of murdering his buddy and killing himself at his job for a few extra pennies—it now is assumed, quite to the contrary, that he is essentially determined by a “group solidarity.” But in both cases, it is merely a matter of management’s knowledge *about* the workers, and this knowledge is supposed to allow management to utilize them better for purposes of production. Group solidarity in its turn has become the new external motive determining the worker’s acts; knowing the motive and acting upon it, one can bring the worker to do what is wanted of him. Management’s situation still remains that of the engineer charged with laying out and ordering the assembly and operation of the parts of the human mechanism that make up the enterprise and of which he knows the laws. That the author of these laws is no longer Bentham, but Freud or Elton Mayo, changes nothing. And we need hardly add that it is *still* impossible to know industrial reality. Mired in this perspective and utilized toward these ends, psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology are emptied of their content and transformed into their opposite.<sup>38</sup> That the group, for example, is not for its members an external motive, that it is the unity of self-determination creating and recreating itself, that thereby it sooner or later can only set itself against every kind of external management that tries to impose itself on this group—these truths can be of no service to management, for they challenge its very foundations. Management can possess only the theory of its own practice, i.e., of its social existence.

But contradictions that are just as insoluble tear apart the managerial apparatus, independently, so to speak, of its permanent struggle against the executants. A series of factors, all of which derive in the last analysis from the tendency to confine laborers to more and more limited tasks of execution, leads to an extraordinary proliferation within the managerial apparatus itself. Taking on itself a constantly increasing number of tasks, the managerial apparatus can exist only as an enormous collective organ. In a large enterprise, the individuals employed in offices and departments already constitute in themselves a sizable enterprise.<sup>39</sup> This collective organ itself undergoes a twofold division of labor within its own ranks. On the one hand, the managerial apparatus is subdivided into “specialized branches”—the various “services” in the enterprise’s offices. On the other hand, within this apparatus as a whole and within each of these “services,” the division between directors and executants inevitably is instaurated anew. By this very fact, all the aforementioned conflicts reappear within the managerial apparatus.

The organization of work within the managerial apparatus obviously can occur only under the same forms of “rationalization” as were applied to production proper: subdivision and compartmentalization of tasks, transformation of individuals into a mass of anonymous and interchangeable executants, etc. It engenders the same consequences in both places. In order to tame the workers’ struggle, management thus ends up introducing the class struggle into its own

ranks. Condemned to a compartmentalized job, deprived of all meaningful skills, reduced to salaries comparable to those paid to workers, deprived (in statistical terms) of any real chance of advancement, the vast majority of employees in the managerial apparatus now have trouble distinguishing themselves from their fellow workers on the shop floor; at bottom, only illusions that are being increasingly undermined by their real situation are capable of keeping them separate from the workers.<sup>40</sup> Independent of this process that unifies the various strata of executives in the enterprise, the principal result of the appearance of this mass of executives within the managerial apparatus is that *management no longer has even itself at its own disposal*; even if they are not in solidarity with the workers, vis-à-vis their work the lower strata of nonproduction employees have the same attitude as production workers.

On the other hand, the unavoidable fragmentation of the managerial apparatus into a series of specialized services inevitably creates a problem of reuniting the activities, methods, and viewpoints of these services. Each of them tends to champion its own viewpoint at the expense of the others, for this is the sole means by which it can assert its importance and enlarge its position within the apparatus. Now, the summit of the managerial apparatus, which is charged with resolving these conflicts, does not in general have any rational criterion for doing so. To do this, indeed, it would have to be able to take on itself all opposing points of view; i.e., it would have to in fact “duplicate” all the costly services that have been set up so laboriously. This is in fact the solution to which a number of managers are led: They surround themselves with an exclusive personal team, a sort of private and clandestine general staff.<sup>41</sup> Management thus is obliged to inaugurate its own informal organization in opposition to the formal one it has already set up. However, it is obvious not only that these two solutions refute each other (either the clandestine general staff is useless or else it proves how useless a good part of the official departments are) but also that their juxtaposition can only be the source of new conflicts. And ultimately, top management does not run anything at all; it is reduced to *arbitrating* between opposing viewpoints and it does this in a truly arbitrary fashion, for it knows hardly anything about the problems in question. Logically speaking, its sole foundation now is merely that whatever decision it makes, even an arbitrary or absurd one, is more valuable than the total absence of decision making.<sup>42</sup>

The absence of rational criteria capable of aiding in the resolution of conflicts between opposing points of view that arise unavoidably within management’s bureaucratic apparatus is combined with another phenomenon of capital importance: the absence of rational criteria concerning the placement of individuals within this apparatus. These two factors are at the root of the traits that are characteristic of every modern bureaucratic apparatus: the struggle of all against all for “advancement,” the formation of cliques and clans that dominate in a hidden [*occulte*] fashion the “official” life of the apparatus, and the transformation of objective options into stakes in the struggle between cliques and clans.

We must fully understand the meaning of this analysis of the contradictions of bureaucratic management. We are not comparing the latter to a perfect manage-

ment in order to draw out the failings it exhibits in relation to such an imaginary standard. There is no perfect management, whatever the social structure (even if it be the organized collectivity of producers), and such a comparison would be completely meaningless. From every standpoint we have examined, a human management would encounter problems as well as difficulties as to how to solve such problems. The preceding discussion has no bearing on the possibility of eliminating these problems. It shows rather that the structure and the nature of the present form of management, which is a bureaucratic form of management external to the activities it is supposed to direct, *make its problems insoluble*, or at best, prevent its problems from being “resolved” except at the price of enormous wastefulness and perpetual crises.

Perfect foresight will never exist. And it need not exist for production to be organized rationally. The present structure, however, is implicitly based on the hypothesis that such foresight exists, and that management possesses it. Since in theory the producers are incapable of carrying out “on the job” the permanent readjustment of the plan to reality, this adjustment must be carried out a priori and once and for all by management. By virtue of this, the “production plan” — of the enterprise or of the entire economy — acquires an absolute value. Since the permanent process of making adjustments between foresight — without which there is no rational action — and reality is upset by the fact that managers are radically separated from executants, balance can be reestablished in each instance only by fits and starts, and through specific, belated, spasmodic interventions.

The problem of obtaining adequate information will always exist. But the present structure renders the problem literally insoluble, for its very existence drives the whole of society to conspire to mask reality. The problem of making individuals adequate for the functions they fulfill will exist for a long time to come. But, by arranging these functions along a hierarchical pyramid, by tying not only the economic fate of the individual but also his total situation and ultimately his sense of self-worth to his success in a desperate and absurd struggle against everyone else, the present structure destroys all possibility of a rational solution. Human society will always be faced with options that are not geometrical problems admitting of a single, unique solution at the end of one rigorously defined path. But the present structure either fails to pose these problems explicitly or resolves them in terms of factors that are external to their content.

Now, unless there is a radical overthrow of the present structure, this separate type of management is inevitable. The activities of thousands of individuals and elementary groups have to be coordinated in one fashion or another. The “universal” point of view of the enterprise’s operation has to prevail over the “particular” viewpoints of the workers or of their groups. Ultimately, then, a *particular* group of managers has to take it upon themselves to impose this “universal” viewpoint upon the *totality* of producers. From then on, conflict is inevitable.

First of all, for each group of workers, the imperatives arising out of this “universal” standpoint of the management take the form of an arbitrarily imposed external law. Its justification cannot even be known, and by this very fact it therefore appears to be completely irrational. But management’s “universal”



point of view is in fact another particular point of view; this viewpoint, which is partial in both senses of the word [*partial et partiel*], is the viewpoint of a *particular* stratum that has access to only a part of reality, that lives a life apart from actual production, and that has its own interests to put forward. Inversely, the “particular” point of view of groups of producers is in fact a universal point of view. The point of view of each elementary group is found again in all the others. The norms arising within them are identical. The interests they try to advance are the same. Management endeavors to *think about* the actual reality of production. The producers *are* this actual reality itself. Taken in their totality, they embrace the totality of aspects of the activity of the enterprise—in fact, they *are* this totality.

But are they really? Can they, across the many shops and offices of the enterprise, actually form an organic unity? Are they not all riveted to specific places on the total machine of the workplace? Is not each of them deprived of a view of everything else and incapable of connecting with the overall living totality of the enterprise? An analysis can show their mutual identity, and it can combine them. But can they themselves become united? Only the analysis of working-class struggles can furnish an answer to these questions.

### **The Working-Class Struggle against Alienation**

The capitalist organization of production is profoundly contradictory. Capitalist management claims it deals only with the individual worker, whereas in fact production is carried out by the collectivity of workers. It claims to reduce the worker to a limited and determined set of tasks, but it is obliged at the same time to rely upon the universal capacities he develops both as a function of and in opposition to the situation in which he is placed. By exhaustively defining in advance the methods by which these tasks are to be executed, it claims to remove from them every element involving managerial duties. But as such, an exhaustive definition always is impossible. Production can be carried out only insofar as the worker himself organizes his work and goes beyond his theoretical role of pure and simple executant.

The conflicts that result from this situation culminate in a veritable anarchy of production in each enterprise. But they create at the same time a contradictory situation and a contradictory attitude in the workers themselves. The conditions in which they are placed impel them to organize their production work in the most effective manner, to upgrade the machinery, to invent new processes, etc. The way capitalism organizes production obliges them to do so, for when something goes wrong it is the workers who pay (and who cannot defend themselves merely by pointing out that the factory is badly organized). On the other hand, however, as soon as they manifest themselves, the workers’ organization and creativity are combated by the managerial apparatus. In any case, these qualities are continually being disrupted and butchered by this apparatus. Indeed, under present conditions, improvements in the organization and methods of production initiated by workers essentially profit capital, which often

then seizes hold of them and turns them against the workers. The workers know it and consequently they restrict their participation in production, both consciously as well as unconsciously. They restrict their output; they keep their ideas to themselves; they make use of improvements on their individual machines that they carefully hide from the foremen; they organize among themselves to carry out their work, all the while keeping up a facade of respect for the official way they are supposed to organize their work—and so on.<sup>43</sup>

This contradictory attitude on the part of the workers signifies that the insurmountable conflict that tears through capitalist society is transposed into the heart of the proletariat itself, into the behavior of the individual worker as well as into the attitudes of the working class. It would be entirely wrong to represent the proletariat as a full positivity, like some kind of class that already bears within itself the solution to all problems and that an enemy class and a form of social organization that remains foreign alone prevent it from achieving such solutions. That would be both a demagogic mystification and a poor, superficial theory. Capitalism would not be able to continue to exist if the crisis it is undergoing did not have repercussions within the proletariat itself. The oppression, the exploitation, and the alienation created by capitalism express themselves in the working class through contradictions that till now it has not succeeded in overcoming. The positivity of the working class comes from the fact that it does not remain simply torn by these contradictions, but constantly struggles to overcome them and that, at the most diverse levels, the meaning [*contenu*] of this struggle is the autonomous organization of the working class, workers' management of production, and, ultimately, the reorganization of society.

Bureaucrats—and sometimes even revolutionary militants deformed by a narrow “Marxism” they have outgrown but have not been able to shed—do not want to see in the proletariat's struggles anything but a tendency toward improving its standard of living, or at best a struggle “against exploitation.” But the proletariat's struggle is not and *cannot be* simply a struggle “against” exploitation; it *necessarily* tends to be a struggle for a new organization of the relations of production. These are only two aspects of the same thing, for the root of exploitation is the present organization of the relations of production. The worker can be exploited, i.e., the fruits of his labor can be expropriated from him, only insofar as the direction of his labor is expropriated from him. And the struggle against exploitation quickly places before him the problem of management. This always is true on the shop floor and periodically on the level of the factory and of society as a whole.

Usually one fixes one's eyes on the “historical” moments of proletarian action (revolutions and general strikes) or, at the very least, on what can be called its *explicit* organization and activity (trade unions, parties, big strikes). But these actions and organizations can be comprehended only as moments of a permanent process of action and organization that finds its origin in the depths of everyday life in the workplace and that can sustain itself and remain adequate to its intentions only on the condition that it continually returns to these depths. Under the title of *implicit struggle* we include this everyday activity and organiza-

tion, the capital importance of which must henceforth be given full recognition. It is implicit in the proletariat's existence, in its very condition as being proletarian. The informal or elementary organization of workers is only one aspect of this struggle. Organization is only one logical moment of the process of struggle—and the same is true of action. Struggle includes action, organization, and the setting of objectives. Our purpose is much more general than the analysis of informal organization since it also includes both informal *actions* and informal *objectives*. This implicit struggle is only the flip side, one could say, of the proletariat's everyday *work*. Work in the capitalist enterprise does not occur without struggle. This situation follows directly from an organization of work based upon the opposition between directors and executives.

Thus, the capitalist organization of work tends to rely upon the definition of work norms. Workers struggle against these norms. In this struggle, only a "defense against exploitation" can be seen. But in fact, it contains infinitely more: Precisely because he is trying to defend himself against exploitation, the worker is obliged to demand the right to determine his own work pace and to refuse to be treated like a thing.

Once a norm is defined, problems are far from being settled. It is only the boundaries of a battlefield that have just been defined. In this battle, the battle over actual output, the workers are led to organize themselves, to invent new means of acting, and to define objectives. Nothing is given to them in advance; everything has to be created and conquered in the midst of struggle.

The dynamic of the sequence of objectives, organization, and means of action, is plain to see. The workers aim for the maximum amount of pay for "an honest day's work." This maximum has meaning only as a collective maximum—in other words, every attempt to reach a maximum amount of pay for an individual quickly is revealed to be illusory and ultimately is turned against the individual who made the attempt. The achievement of this initial objective implies the pursuit of the greatest possible amount of freedom within the given framework of the capitalist enterprise. It equally implies the pursuit of the maximum amount of real efficiency in production—an indispensable condition for achieving labor savings. The workers thereby are led to struggle against the entire set of methods for organizing production along capitalist lines. They are led equally to organize themselves in an "elementary" or "informal" fashion under forms that capitalism constantly breaks up and that they continually recreate.

We are not saying that the workers always or even most of the time achieve these objectives. In the last analysis, they cannot achieve them without smashing the capitalist organization of the enterprise—which is impossible without at the same time smashing the capitalist organization of society. Setbacks and defeats are inevitable phases in this process. But as long as the capitalist organization is there, the struggle will always be reborn from its ashes and will be led both by its own dynamic and by the objective dynamic of capitalist society to widen and deepen. This is the meaning of this struggle that we have been trying to bring out.

Neither are we saying that this meaning is simple, a state of grace automatically investing the working-class condition, a socialist apriority innate to prole-

tarians. The proletariat is not socialist—it becomes so, or more exactly, it *makes itself* socialist. And, long before it came to appear as socialist by organizing itself into trade unions and parties with this name, it makes appear the embryonic elements of a new form of social organization, of a new type of behavior and of a new human way of thinking, in its everyday life and in its daily struggle within the capitalist enterprise. It is upon this terrain that we will now begin to analyze the dynamic and the signification of working-class struggles.

### The Struggle over Output

The tendency of workers to regulate their own work pace to the greatest extent possible—by combating management’s norms, and then by “bending” these norms with all the means at their disposal—appears to management as “restricting output” or “restricting production.” Faced with such curtailment, the classical “rational” counterresponse is “output-based wages” or “piece-rate wages.”<sup>44</sup> The worker thus will be driven, “in his own interest,” to increase output to the maximum. In doing so, he also will, incidentally, provide indications of what levels of output can be attained—which will make it possible to revise the norms downward when the time comes.

Industrial sociologists (mainly the Elton Mayo school) have criticized this method as “mechanistic” because it postulates that the worker is an “economic man” whose sole motive is getting the maximum amount of earnings whereas in reality other motives play a much more important role. This critique starts from a correct idea in order to come up with a false conclusion. It gets at the capitalist system as a whole, but falls far short of the problem that concerns us. Workers certainly are not “economic men.” They behave exactly like “economic men,” however, *toward management*. They pay management back in its own coin.

First of all, workers generally do not go for the efficiency bait, for experience teaches them that after a short period of receiving bonus pay a draconian reduction in the norms will supervene.<sup>45</sup> Next, they discover ways to get an increase in wages *without* a real or apparent increase in output.

In small- or medium-scale production with individual bonuses, the means used by workers are practically unstoppable. Taking as an example the shop described by an American author,<sup>46</sup> these means can be set forth as follows.

1. To avoid having the norms revised after output increases, the workers never *show* (which does not mean that they never *attain*) results surpassing 145-150 percent of the norm.

2. On the “gravy jobs,” which represent nearly half the jobs done in the shop and which are defined by the possibility of going far beyond normal output, when the workers cannot “fix” the actual output so as not to appear to exceed these set maximums, they “loaf,” either literally or figuratively. The resulting wastefulness is estimated by the author with the help of some long and involved, but quite conservative, calculations at around 40 percent of the workers’ time—and that, in his opinion, is an “underestimation.”

3. On the “stinkers,” which represent the other half of the shop’s jobs and

which are defined by the fact that it is impossible to get a substantial pay bonus no matter how much effort is made (the cut-off point seems to be, in the case analyzed by Roy, in the neighborhood of 120 percent of the norm), the workers generally “goldbrick” and fall back on the base rate (the hourly rate determined in collective bargaining, whatever the output actually achieved). There is, nevertheless, an important exception: If the “stinker” in question comes in large lots or is a job that must be done often, there begins a relentless struggle with the time-study men to revise the norms.<sup>47</sup> The wastefulness brought about in such a case is, according to the author, comparable to that of the previous case.

4. The very existence of these two types of jobs (as well as other minor jobs paid by the hour: machinery setups, jobs for which norms have not yet been established, “reworking” defective pieces) gives the workers ample opportunities to increase their pay without their apparent output going beyond the “normal” rate. Thus, if a worker has a “gravy job” for four hours, during which he could work at 200 percent of the norm, and a “stinker” for four hours, during which he will not be able to work at the norm, he can choose between three options. He can (a) follow management’s formal rules, in which case he will make a twelve-hour wage ( $4 \times 2 + 4 \times 1$ )—with the certainty that a few days later the time allotted for the “gravy job” will be reduced. He can (b) hold back on the gravy job to 150 percent; he then will make a ten-hour wage ( $4 \times 1.5 + 4 \times 1$ ). Last, he can (c) work at 200 percent of the norm on the “gravy job” and at 100 percent on the other one, but *report* that the first job was carried out in  $5\frac{1}{3}$  hours and the second in  $2\frac{2}{3}$  hours. It then will appear that the worker had worked at 150 percent of the norm in both cases, he will make a twelve-hour wage, the maximum amount of production will be carried out—and there will be no danger of the time allotments being reduced.<sup>48</sup>

The worker can obtain a similar result by changing the apparent allocation of his time between the “gravy jobs” and jobs paid by the hour (with the difference that in this case he increases his pay without increasing production).

5. For the workers to be able to realize these possibilities, most of the work rules established by management have to be broken. In fact, the whole system of capitalist “rationalization” of labor is struck down by it; management loses the ability to determine the breakdown of the workers’ hours between various jobs, and ultimately all its accounting procedures and calculations of profitability are utterly ruined. Therefore, management has to react and it can do so only by instaurating additional “controls.” If these controls are “effective,” they lead the workers toward solution (b) as described in 4—namely, restriction of output, and hence wastefulness.

These controls, however, quickly become ineffective. If the inspectors remain in their offices, they basically can inspect nothing at all. This is the case with the time-study men, who are used in fact, according to Roy’s phrase, as the true “hatchet men” of upper management: Though they are merciless against machine operators whom they find breaking the rules and get them dismissed immediately, these time-study men described by Roy appear only very rarely on the shop floor. If they are stationed in the shop, they cannot resist the continuous pressure of the operators for long.<sup>49</sup> Such is the case with the “time check-

ers” who are supposed to record the time at the beginning and the end of each job specifically to prevent any “fixing” of real output. Quite soon these time checkers themselves ask the operators, “When do you want me to check you?” In fact, not only production workers but all “service” employees who are in direct and continuous contact with them (“time checkers,” tool-crib attendants, stockchasers, setup men, inspectors, and ultimately even foremen) continually cooperate to a greater or lesser degree to break management’s rules (which in their eyes, and objectively, are absurd) and to allow the workers to “figure the angles.” “Figuring the angles” would be impossible without this constant cooperation involving all the parts of the managerial apparatus that are in ongoing contact with the producers.

Not being able to trust its human representatives, management is obliged once again to fall back on impersonal and abstract regulations. It introduces new regulations aimed at making the transgression of its rules “objectively impossible.” But the objective observance of these new regulations of necessity depends in turn upon human control: Their effectiveness presupposes that the problem they are called upon to resolve is already resolved. From this standpoint, additional regulations are made in vain, for workers in cooperation with the lower strata of the “auxiliary services” quickly succeed in circumventing them.

But there is more: Most of the time these regulations introduce an additional degree of wastefulness and anarchy. The operators and the service employees are obliged by this very fact to devote part of their efforts not only to circumventing the regulations but to compensating for its irrational effects.

Thus, in the factory described by Donald Roy, in order to keep the machine operators from “figuring the angles” (allocating the apparent distribution of their time between different jobs as it suits them), management appoints “time checkers.” In fact, the latter become the operators’ allies and are turned against management. At a certain point, management decides to react and to make a “ruling” aimed at making the operators’ “make-out angles” “objectively impossible.” The “ruling” in question forbids the operators from keeping their tools and other auxiliary means of production (the “setups”) next to their machines after a given job is finished as well as from getting what they need from the tool-crib attendants “in advance” (these two practices obviously being necessary to do any other work than what they are supposed to be doing). Tool orders in triplicate are used to guarantee adequate monitoring. At the end of each shift, the work-order card and all tool setups have to be turned in to the tool-crib attendants, whether the job is finished or not. The setup work then has to be started all over again by the next shift.

The rule’s effects—which indeed have been foreseen by experienced workers—are not long in coming: a considerable increase in the tool-crib attendants’ workload resulting both from increased paperwork and from the need to reassemble and re-sort the requested tools after each shift (up until then, the machine operators and setup men served themselves from the tool crib); also, there is a considerable loss of time for the workers and long lines begin to form at the tool crib. But management’s desired result is not achieved: The triplicate forms

are filled out and exchanged each time—but the tool-crib attendants continue to supply the operators in advance with their tools.

Faced with this situation, management, four months later, modifies its first rule with a second one. To avoid long lines forming in front of the crib the shifts no longer are obliged to turn in their work-order cards and tools at the end of their workday, but tools can be furnished from then on only upon an order in duplicate from the “time checkers.” At the same time, the inspectors have to countersign the time a job ends before a new work order can be obtained (this is done to permit a cross-check of the times marked by the “time checkers” and the inspectors).

Nevertheless, the second rule also results merely in increased paperwork for the tool-crib attendants. The setup men, who are allowed to go into the tool crib, pick up setups ahead of time for the operators. The inspectors quickly fall in step and “countersign” the time cards as requested by the operators. The shop gets back into a routine again, under slightly different procedures—and with a notable increase in the production of pink, white, and blue paper.

Management does not let itself get discouraged. It publishes a third “ruling” officially forbidding anyone from going into the tool crib except the tool-crib employees and two superintendents. The order, signed by Faulkner, the director of the factory, is posted on the tool-crib door.

An old machine operator, Hank, predicts that the new order “won’t last out the week,” and a setup man explains why its effects will be

tough on the grinders and crib attendants, because setup men and foremen have been doing much of the [tool] grinding and have made it easier for them by coming in to help themselves to tools, jigs, etc.

A new line forms in front of the crib as a result of the third rule. The foremen are furious, they yell at the crib attendants and warn them that they will make out allowance cards charging them for every minute of time the workers are delayed because they do not have their tools. The boys who are standing in line at the crib window growl or wisecrack about the crib attendants.

Then Jonesy, the most conscientious and most efficient of the crib attendants, declares that he has “had enough” and lets foremen and setup men back into the crib again. The notes taken the same evening by D. Roy are worth citing verbatim.

Just ten days after the new order was promulgated, the sun began to break through the dark clouds of managerial efficiency. Hank’s prediction was off by four days. . . . Johnny (setup man) and others seemed to be going in and out of the crib again, almost at will. . . . When I asked Walt (crib attendant) for some jaws to fit the chuck I had found, he said: “We’ve got lots of jaws back here, but I wouldn’t know what to look for. You’d better get the setup man to come back here and find you some.” Walt said to me: “I break the rules here, but not too much—just within reason to keep the boys on production.”

Faulkner's order still hangs at eye level on the crib door. . . .

"And so much for Faulkner's order!" The "fix" was "on" again, and operators and their service-group allies conducted business as usual for the remaining weeks of the writer's employment.

The dialectic of this situation can be summed up easily in a certain number of moments of universal import. The essential element in production costs is human labor (in any case, the sole element upon which management can or thinks it can continually act: the others depend on factors that for the most part are beyond its control). Management seeks to reduce its costs by trying to obtain maximum output with minimum pay. The workers want to get maximum pay by providing what they consider a fair amount of output. Whence the fundamental conflict over the content of the work hour.

Management tries to overcome this conflict through "rationalization," through a strict definition of the amount of effort to be provided by the workers, tying their pay to the amount of production attained. This "rationalization" only makes the initial conflict grow and blossom into a number of specific conflicts: over the setting of norms, the concrete application of such norms, the quality of tools and machinery and their depreciation, the application of regulations aimed at organizing work from management's viewpoint.

The initial conflict, far from being overcome, is broadened at the same time as it is deepened, for management's successive counterresponses force the workers to put all aspects of the organization of labor into question. At the same time, the overhead costs of capitalist management are considerably increased: voluntary restriction of output on the part of the workers, time taken up merely struggling against norms and regulations, multiplication of auxiliary services and in particular "supervisory" services that in each instance have to be rechecked by others, etc.<sup>a</sup>

## Notes

1. In *CS II*.

2. See *RPB*, in *SB I*, pp. 286-310 [T/E: see "The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy," this volume, starting with the section entitled "Working-Class Resistance: Ultimate Cause of the Failure of the 'Plan,'" and ending with the first half of "The Political Evolution of De-Stalization"].

3. Concerning the problem of remunerating labor in a socialist society: *CS I*, pp. 12-15 [T/E: reprinted in *CS*, pp. 83-87, and included in *PSW I* as the second section of *CS I*, "The Idea of the Autonomy of the Proletariat and Marxism"]; apropos of the very nature of work and of the "reduction of the workday" as a solution to the problem of alienation: *CS II*, pp. 14-22 [T/E: reprinted in *CS*, pp. 123-37, and included in this volume as section 4 of *CS II*, "Socialism Is the Transformation of Work"].

4. See the critique of this conception in *CS II*, pp. 14-22 [T/E: see preceding note].

5. T/E: Castoriadis uses the phrase "une seule bonne méthode" followed by the English phrase "the one best way" within quotation marks and in parentheses.

6. With the addition of various other factors, like the percentages allotted for "taking account of unforeseen possibilities"—which in fact can be assessed only empirically and arbitrarily and which thereby ruin the alleged "rationality" of the rest.

7. We are talking about scientific management insofar as it applies to the problems of output by human beings. As production engineers, the Taylorists were able to play a positive role in a host of



domains concerning the material rationalization of production—and sometimes also the rationalization of human motion by making known to others the most economical methods, as picked up from individual workers.

8. Thus a strike breaks out in an enterprise following an average 20 percent reduction in time allowances in the assembly shop. Among other issues, the shop stewards brought up the fact that “components were now supplied in bulk, whereas previously they had been sorted and laid out in a carrier; moreover, frequent stoppages were caused by bad supply arrangements at assembly points, which penalized workers paid on an output basis” (R. J. Jouffret, “Description of Two Cases in Which Human Relations in Industry Were Impaired by the Efficient Use of Time Study in Determining Production Bonuses,” in *Human Relations in Industry* [Paris: European Productivity Agency, 1956], p. 202). Such situations exist everywhere.

9. Jouffret, *ibid.*, p. 201. The times noted are adjusted to the “normal (performance) rates” and “rest coefficients,” which can be based only upon the time-study engineers’ estimations.

10. Here we have one of the “findings” of the famous Hawthorne factory experiments conducted in the United States from 1924 to 1927 under the direction of Elton Mayo: “It was found that the more intelligent the girl, the greater was the number of variations (in her movements).” J. A. C. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Industry* (London: Penguin, 1956), p. 72.

11. The “objective-scientific” measurability of labor time aimed at by Taylorism “extends right into the workers’ ‘soul’: even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it so as to facilitate their integration into specialized rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts. . . . In consequence of the rationalization of the work-processes, the human qualities and idiosyncracies appear increasingly as mere sources of errors” (G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971], p. 88.)

12. See the summary of this critique in J. A. C. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Industry*, chapters 1 and 3. Speaking of Taylorism, Alain Touraine writes (*L’Evolution du travail ouvrier aux usines Renault* [Paris: CNRS, 1955], p. 115): “Since Taylor, personnel administrators have striven to stop (the workers) from ‘loafing,’ but Taylor’s pseudoscientific and purely coercive methods today are condemned; the importance of human relations, of communications, of informal organization, i.e., of social adjustment [T/E: Touraine places the English phrase ‘social adjustment’ in parentheses and in italics, following the phrase ‘*intégration sociale*’] of the worker into the enterprise, has become the principal theme of American Personnel Management.” [T/E: “Personnel Management” appears in English.] But what value is there in condemning Taylor when it is well known that the great majority of French businesses pay workers on an output basis, using time-motion studies (R. J. Jouffret, “Description,” p. 200)? In fact, as we shall see, management has responded to the bankruptcy of Taylorism with *more* and not with *less* coercion. As for “human relations,” we will come to it later.

13. The first person to experience this struggle obviously was Taylor himself. Speaking of the first years of his career, when he himself applied his method in factories, he wrote, “I was a great deal older than I am now, what with the worry, meanness, and contemptibleness of the whole damn thing. It’s a horrid life for any man to live not being able to look any workman in the face without seeing hostility there, and a feeling that every man around you is your virtual enemy” (cited by J. A. C. Brown, *The Social Psychology of Industry*, p. 14). See a description of the workers’ attitude toward time-study men in Georges Vivier, “La Vie en usine,” *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 12 (August 1953), pp. 38 and 40, Daniel Mothé, “L’Usine et la gestion ouvrière,” *ibid.*, 22 (July 1957), pp. 90-92 [partially reproduced in *Journal d’un ouvrier* (Paris: Minuit, 1959)]; Paul Romano, “L’Ouvrier américain,” *ibid.*, 2 (May 1949), pp. 84-85 [T/E: “Life in the Factory,” in Romano and Stone, *The American Worker* (1947; reprinted, Detroit, Bewick Editions, 1972), p. 9]: “When the time-study men are about, the worker will find a multitude of reasons for shutting the machine down.” The systematic slowdown of work performed in front of the time-study men is a universal rule. When time studies are done, the workers switch to lower speeds and slower “feeds” than the ones they will use later on; “operators deemed it necessary to embellish the timing performance with movements . . . that could be dropped *instanter* with the departure of the time-study man” (Donald Roy, “Efficiency and ‘The Fix,’” *American Journal of Sociology*, 60 [November 1954], pp. 255-66).

14. R. J. Jouffret, “Description,” p. 201. The idea that the workers “should normally” accept revisions in the allotted times is all the more astonishing since the author himself shows that the revision that provoked the conflict ended up stealing from the workers at least 10 percent of their time

and since he concludes his study by saying that in this firm “the lack of confidence felt by the workers in the procedure of the Methods Department proved to be largely justified as a result of the joint survey subsequent to the dispute.”

15. See “Stakhanovisme et mouchardage dans les usines tchécoslovaques,” by V. W. in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 3 (July 1949), pp. 82-87, and Guillaume’s short report, “La Déstakhanovisation en Pologne,” *ibid.*, 19 (July 1956), pp. 144-45.

16. Testimony gathered by us from factory workers.

17. R. J. Jouffret, “Description,” p. 201-2.

18. Donald Roy, “Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 57 (March 1952), pp. 427-42. It should be noted that the entire analysis of the “Hawthorne experiment” made by the Elton Mayo school is based on the assumption that workers in the shops studied had no “rational reason” for restricting their output and that it therefore was necessary to find “nonlogical” motives for their behavior. Roy remarks in this regard: “John Mills, onetime research engineer in telephony and for five years engaged in personnel work for Bell Telephone Company, has recently indicated the possibility that there were factors in the *bank-wiring* room situation which the Mayo group failed to detect: ‘Reward is supposed to be in direct proportion to production. Well, I remember the first time I ever got behind that fiction. I was visiting the Western Electric Company, which had a reputation of never cutting a piece rate. It never did; if some manufacturing process was found to pay more than seemed right for the class of labor employed on it—if, in other words, the rate-setters had misjudged—that particular part was referred to the engineers for redesign, and then a new rate was set on the new part. Workers, in other words, were paid as a class, they were supposed to make about so much a week with their best efforts and, of course, less for less competent efforts’ (*The Engineer in Society* [New York: Van Nostrand, 1946], p. 93).” (Quoted by Roy, “Quota Restriction,” p. 431.) Let us add that the Mayo research group literally lived in the shop in question for five years and that it claimed to be studying reality without any preestablished theoretical schema, without any “preconceived ideas.” This is what allowed them to rediscover in reality their unconscious ideas (for example, that management is always logical, and that, if the workers oppose management, it can only be for “nonlogical” reasons) and to ignore facts as massive as those mentioned by Mills.

19. On conflicts over quality control, see Mothé’s article, “L’Usine et la gestion ouvrière,” in *S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957), particularly p. 103. “To succeed in ‘earning a living’ (i.e., in not exceeding your time allotments), one has to cut corners on quality, eliminate an operation here and there. In the factory, this currently is called “sabotage” (G. Vivier, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 14 [April 1954], p. 57). This cutting of corners is the “streamlining” [T/E: the word appears italicized and in English in the original] of American factory parlance; cf. Roy, “Efficiency and the ‘Fix,’” p. 257. On the contradictions, the resort to empirical methods, and the proliferation of piecework-related supervisory services, see Touraine, *L’Evolution*, pp. 169-70. Touraine concludes that ultimately “the unwieldiness of supervisory controls poses the question of returning to self-control,” i.e., quality control over pieces by the semiskilled workers who manufacture them. It is not difficult to see that such an apparently minuscule change is impossible without a total overthrow of the structure of the factory, of wages, of the relations between the worker and his work.

20. Roy, “Efficiency and the ‘Fix.’”

21. These are what Anglo-Saxon sociologists call “informal groups” or “primary groups.” [T/E: In the original, Castoriadis gives the French translation of these two phrases. We have retained throughout his phrase, “elementary groups,” to distinguish his analysis from that of these “Anglo-Saxon sociologists.”]

22. We shall see later that the divergence between the workers’ spontaneous organization and the factory’s official organization is, from a certain point of view, the condensed expression of all the conflicts and of all the contradictions of the capitalist enterprise.

23. The study of elementary groups goes back to Charles H. Cooley (*Human Nature and the Social Order* [1902; reprinted, New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1983]). Its application to industrial sociology is tied to the works of Elton Mayo and his school. See, in particular, Elton Mayo, *The Social Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (1945; reprinted, Salem, N.H.: Ayer, 1977).

24. Mayo, *Social Problems*, Chapter 2, “The Rabble Hypothesis and Its Corollary, the State Absolute.”

25. T/E: Castoriadis uses the English phrase “rabble hypothesis” in italics, followed by the French phrase “postulat de la horde.” What we have translated as “the molecular hypothesis” is what he calls the “postulat moléculaire.”

26. Remark by Philippe Guillaume.

27. Unless, once again, such “recognition” [*reconnaissance*] means inviting management to utilize its “acquaintances [*connaissances*]” in such groups in order to worm its way into them, the better to combat them. Contemporary American literature and cinema offer many examples of this type of utilization: Thus in the film *Blackboard Jungle*, an elementary group is broken up by discrediting the “ringleader” in the eyes of its members.

28. We are thinking in particular of Mayo, but the same can be said of *all* of industrial sociology. Thus Brown, in his excellent synthesis of industrial sociology already cited, persistently recapitulates the criticisms developed by several writers in this regard against Mayo and emphasizes that elementary groups have their own logic, in no way “inferior” to management’s logic, but he remains unable to get himself out of the contradiction as thus stated. And for good reason, for the only way out is workers’ management—obviously an “unscientific” idea for a sociologist.

29. See the extraordinarily vivid description of this informal organization in the Renault factories by Mothé, “L’Usine et la gestion ouvrière,” in particular pp. 81-90, 101-2, and 106-10.

30. An informal organization also exists, of course, at higher echelons in the management apparatus—but, as will be seen later, it obeys another type of logic than that of an informal organization of executives.

31. See a description of this kind of cooperation in Mothé’s “L’Usine,” as well as the long quotations from Roy that we provide later.

32. Of course, it is not a matter here of separate time periods, but of simultaneous facets, of logical moments in the process of organizing production.

33. See in this regard Mothé’s long exposition in “L’Usine”; likewise those of Vivier (*Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 12 [August 1953], pp. 46-47, 14 [April 1954], pp. 56-57) and of Paul Romano (*ibid.*, 2 [May 1949], pp. 89-91 [T/E: 1972 American edition, pp. 12-14].)

34. Cf. N. Wiener, *Cybernetics* (New York: Wiley, 1948), pp. 172-73.

35. “After each model change, the supervisors frenetically run through the factory trying to get the plans and machinery which have been studied for months in the offices to work normally. At this moment the foreman is boss; he puts the workers where he wants, he breaks up old groups, he asserts his authority. It is the moment of greatest disorganization in the factory. For precisely this reason few Detroit autoworkers will buy a new car immediately after the model changes. They leave this lemon to people who don’t work in a factory and therefore don’t know any better. It is only when the workers are able to reestablish a certain amount of order in production that things go smoothly. The foreman has been put in charge of a group of workers and he is told what he should make them do. The organization he brings about is always bad. The assembly line goes too quickly or else there is only a single man where there should be two. The workers explain that to him, but he has his orders and cannot make any changes based on what the workers say. The men therefore are obliged to take the situation in hand themselves. They screw up the work so that the assembly line has to be stopped. Finally, after this situation has gone on for some time, management wises up, production is adjusted, and the cars produced are worth the price of purchase” (*The American Civilization*, mimeotyped text produced by the American group from Detroit, *Correspondence*, p. 47; [T/E: despite a long search, no copy of this text has been found; we therefore have retranslated Castoriadis’s French back into English.]

36. See Mothé, “L’Usine,” p. 88.

37. See *RPB*, in *SB 1*, pp. 279-81 [T/E: see “The Proletarian Revolution against the Bureaucracy,” this volume, the third unnumbered subsection of the section entitled “Bureaucratic Planning”].

38. For example, every form of psychoanalysis worthy of the name is based on the idea that the *freedom* of the subject is at one and the same time the end and the means of the therapeutic process—and every utilization of psychoanalysis by industrial sociology is based on the *manipulation* of the subject, both as means and as ultimate end.

39. In the Renault factories, the percentage of “monthly salaried workers” went from 6.5 of the total in 1919 to 11.7 in 1930, 17.8 in 1937, and 20.2 in January 1954 (Touraine, *L’Evolution*, pp.

164-65). On the development of offices in American industry, see C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 65-70.

40. In this regard, the analysis of the attitude of these strata, as furnished by C. Wright Mills in the final chapters of his *White Collar*, has the following shortcomings: (1) It mixes disparate categories of "white-collar proletarians" whose situations and outlooks differ fundamentally; and (2) it does not take into account the *dynamic* of their situation. In particular, illusions about "status" will not outlive for long the real conditions that once had nourished them. The phenomenon of the industrialization of office work obviously is of decisive importance in this regard. Cf. R. Berthier's excellent analysis, "Une Expérience d'organisation ouvrière," in *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956), pp. 6ff.

41. At an entirely different level, this phenomenon of "duplicating" the bureaucratic structure that blankets all of society with a more exclusive managing organ, the Party (which unsuccessfully tries to be the authoritative seat of reunification and thereby also tends to render the State's entire bureaucratic apparatus useless) has been brought to light by Claude Lefort, starting off from the speeches of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU. See, in *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956), his article "Le Totalitarisme sans Staline," in particular pp. 45ff. [now in *Eléments*, pp. 166ff.; T/E: 1979 ed., pp. 203ff.]. Let us add that in duplicating the structure of the State bureaucracy, the Party is obliged to reproduce it within its own ranks, creating specialized commissions, etc. That is to say, this is no solution to the problem, by near or by far.

42. On the necessary incompetence of managers within the present system, see C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), especially pp. 138-46 as concerns managers of industry, pp. 205-24 as concerns military leaders, and the final chapter of the book.

43. See the articles by Romano, Vivier, and Mothé already cited. Noting the relatively small number of "suggestions" from workers that are aimed at improving production, Touraine writes: "How is this relative failure to be explained? In the first place by remembrance of the past. The worker, used to seeing his suggestions and his initiatives turned back against him when the time-study men are called in, abandons his former mistrust only slowly" (*L'Evolution*, p. 121). "To abandon slowly" is a euphemism: The figures cited by Touraine refer to the period 1945-47. What has happened since then has not prompted the workers to abandon their mistrust. Quite the contrary.

44. The types, formulas, and names for "wages based on output" are innumerable. But as far as we are concerned here, only the general meaning [*contenu*] of these formulas matters: The worker's wage is, within ample limits, a function of the quantity of production provided.

45. One of the workers in the shop where Roy worked said to him, "Don't you know that if I turned in \$1.50 an hour on these pump bodies tonight, the whole God-damned Methods Department would be down here tomorrow! And they'd retime this job so quick it would make your head swim! And when they'd retime it, they'd cut the price in half?"

46. Roy, in his articles cited earlier.

47. Roy describes at length an epic struggle in such a case between the four best workers in the shop and the time-study men, a struggle that lasted nine months and only came to an end when the workers won. This outcome makes one think—just as Mothé's remarks ("L'Usine," pp. 91-92) do—that the great majority of jobs are "stinkers" at the outset and that it is the workers' struggle against the time allotments that progressively transforms them into "grave jobs."

48. This third option, very likely applied as soon as the conditions for it are given, corresponds exactly to the concept of "maximization of profits in the long run" recently discovered by bourgeois economists as the principle that ought to guide the decision making of capitalist entrepreneurs.

49. Let us recall that the stomach ulcer is the occupational illness of the foreman.

a) This text—of which the first part, a sort of programmatic introduction, was published in July 1955 in *S. ou B.*, no. 17, and whose second part was devoted to a discussion of the problems of a socialist society, in issue no. 22 (July 1957)—continued with an analysis of the proletariat's political struggles, a critique of the overall organization of capitalist society, and an analysis of the crisis of contemporary culture. Events (May 1958, the scission within the *S. ou B.* group) interrupted its elaboration and publication. Parts of the first draft have been used in the writing of *PO I*, *MRCM/MCR*, and *MTR/MRT*. [T/E: The first two texts are included in this volume; the third is to be found in *IIS*.]

## Proletariat and Organization, I

The organizations created by the working class for its liberation have become cogs in the system of exploitation. This is the brutal conclusion forced upon anyone who is prepared to face up to reality. One consequence is that today many are perplexed by an apparent dilemma. Can one become involved without organization? And if one cannot, how can one organize without following the path that has made traditional organizations the fiercest enemies of the aims they originally set out to achieve?

Some believe the question can be approached in a purely negative way. "Experience shows," they say, "that all working-class organizations have degenerated; *therefore*, any organization is bound to degenerate." This is basing too much on experience—or too little. Up to now all revolutions either have been crushed or have degenerated. Are we to deduce from this that all revolutionary struggle should be abandoned? The defeat of revolutions and the degeneration of organizations are different expressions of the same phenomenon, namely, that established society is, at least provisionally, emerging victorious from its struggles with the proletariat. If one concluded that things will always be like this, one ought to be logical and give up the fight. Concern with the problem of organization has meaning only for people convinced that they can and must struggle together (hence, by organizing) and who do not, from the very beginning, assume their own defeat is inevitable.

For such people the questions posed by the degeneration of working-class or-

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ganizations have a real, positive meaning and demand real answers. Why have these organizations degenerated? What does this degeneration mean? What has been the role of these organizations in the temporary setback of the labor movement? Why has the proletariat supported them? And, perhaps more significantly, why has it not moved beyond them? What are the conclusions from all this for future organization and action?

There is no simple answer to these questions, for they concern every aspect and task of the labor movement today. Nor is there a purely theoretical answer. The problem of revolutionary organization will only be resolved as such an organization is actually built. This in turn will depend on the development of working-class action.

Nevertheless, the beginnings of a solution should be attempted right now. Revolutionaries cannot totally abstain from action and wait for working-class struggles to develop. The development of such struggles will not solve the problem of how revolutionaries should organize: They will merely bring it up at a higher level. And in the development of these struggles, organization has a role to play. No real organization will be built without the development of struggles, and there will be no lasting development of these struggles without organization building. If you do not accept this postulate, if you think that what you do or do not do is of no importance, if you are acting purely so as to be at peace with your own conscience, there is no need to read further.

The beginnings of a solution cannot be empirical or just a set of negative prescriptions. A revolutionary group can only adopt positive rules for its action and work, and these rules must spring from its principles. However insignificant the organization, its work, its activity, and its way of going about its daily business must be the visible and verifiable embodiment of the aims it advocates.

Responding to the problem of building a revolutionary organization demands, therefore, that we start from the whole experience of the revolutionary movement and from an analysis of the conditions in which the movement finds itself in the second half of the twentieth century. In order to do this we must make what may seem like a detour, return to first principles and reconsider revolutionary objectives and the history of the labor movement.

### **I. Socialism: Management of Society by the Workers**

One fact, because of its direct and indirect consequences, has dominated human history in the twentieth century: The working class carried through a revolution in Russia in 1917. Far from leading to socialism, however, the revolution finally resulted in the coming to power of a new exploiting class: the bureaucracy. Why, and how, did this happen?<sup>1</sup>

In 1917 the Russian proletariat mobilized itself to destroy the power of the czar and of the capitalists and to put an end to exploitation. It took up arms and organized itself in factory committees and soviets to conduct this struggle. But when, after a long civil war, the remnants of the old regime had been cleared away, economic and political power were once more found to be concentrated in

the hands of a new group of leaders, centered around the Bolshevik party. The proletariat did not take over the management of the new society—which is another way of saying that the working class did not itself become the ruling class. From that moment on, it could only once again resume its position as an exploited class. The degeneration of the Russian revolution was nothing other than the return to a position of supremacy of a specific and restricted social stratum.

The various factors that led to this degeneration all have, when it comes down to it, the same underlying significance. The proletariat did not take on the direction of the revolution and of the society that emerged from it. From the very beginning, it was the Bolshevik party that strove to wield complete power over the country, and very quickly it succeeded in doing so. The Party constituted itself based on the idea that it provided a natural leadership for the proletariat and was the expression of its historical interests. But the ideas and attitudes of the Bolshevik party could never have prevailed had not the working class itself, in its great majority, shared them and had it not tended to see the party as a necessary organ of its power. And so the organs that ought to have expressed the political supremacy of the toiling masses, the soviets, were rapidly transformed into appendages of Bolshevik power.

And yet, even if this development had not occurred in the political sphere, nothing fundamental would have changed, for the revolution did not bring about any profound change in the real relations of production. With the private owners expropriated or exiled, the Bolshevik state entrusted the running of enterprises to managers nominated by itself, and it fought the few attempts made by workers to seize control of the management of production. But those who are masters of production are, in the last analysis, masters of policy and society. A new group of industrial and economic leaders rapidly developed, which, fusing with the leadership of the Party and of the State, constituted a new ruling class.<sup>2</sup>

The basic lesson of the experience of the Russian revolution is therefore that it is not enough for the proletariat to destroy the governmental and economic domination of the bourgeoisie. It can only achieve the objective of its revolution if it builds up its own power in every sphere. If the direction of production, of the economy, and of the “State” again becomes the function of a particular category of individuals, inevitably the exploitation and oppression of workers will return. With these, the permanent crisis that divides contemporary society will arise again, for it owes its origin to the conflict at the point of production between directors and executants.

Socialism is not and cannot be anything other than the management of production, the economy, and society by the workers. This idea has from the very beginning constituted the central thesis of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The Hungarian revolution has since provided a striking confirmation of it.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Autonomy of the Proletariat*

The idea of workers’ management of production and society implies that power in postrevolutionary society will be solely and directly in the hands of the workers’ mass organs (the councils). There can be no question of special organs of

any sort—for example, political parties—taking on the functions of governance and the exercise of power. But this idea is not a simple “constitutional” proposition. It necessitates a reconsideration of all the theoretical and practical problems facing the revolutionary movement.

It would indeed be nonsense to talk of workers’ management if workers were incapable of it and thereby incapable of generating new principles for the organization and orientation of social life. Revolution and, even more, the construction of a socialist society presuppose that the organized mass of workers have become capable of managing the whole of society’s activities without intermediaries—and therefore that they have become capable of directing themselves in all respects and in a permanent fashion. Socialist revolution can only be the outcome of *autonomous* activity on the part of the proletariat, “autonomous” signifying “self-directing” and “responsible only to itself.”

This question must not be confused with the question of the technical capacity of the proletariat to manage production.<sup>4</sup> The proletariat consists of all exploited wage earners and salaried employees. It is the collective producer. Technical knowledge has long ceased to be the monopoly of a few individuals. Today it is diffused among a mass of office and lab workers who are daily submitted to a greater and greater division of labor and who receive salaries only slightly higher than those of manual workers. Technician-bosses are just as superfluous as foremen in production. They are not great irreplaceable engineers but bureaucrats who direct and “organize” (i.e., disorganize) the work of the mass of salaried technicians. Together the exploited workers in factories and offices possess in themselves all the technical skills known to humanity today. For the proletariat in power, the question of the “technical” orientation of production will therefore not be a technical question at all, but rather a *political* question of the unity of workers on the shop floor and in offices, of cooperation between them, and of collective management of production. And, in the same way, the proletariat will be faced with political questions in every sphere including the problems of its own organization, of the proper balance between centralization and decentralization, of the general orientation of production and society, of relations with other social groups (the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie), of international relations, etc.

Socialism, therefore, presupposes a high degree of social and political consciousness among the proletariat. It cannot arise out of a mere revolt against exploitation but only from the capacity of the proletariat to extract from itself positive answers to the immense problems involved in the reconstruction of modern society. No one—no individual, group, or party—can be delegated this consciousness “on behalf of” the proletarian class or in its stead. It is not only that a substitution of this sort would inevitably lead to the formation of a new group of rulers and would rapidly return society to “all the old rubbish.” It is because it is impossible for a particular group to take on such tasks, since these tasks are on a scale that humanity and humanity alone is capable of dealing with. Within a system of exploitation, such problems can be solved by a minority of leaders (or rather they could in the past be solved that way). The crisis of modern regimes shows that the direction of society is a task that is henceforth beyond the



capacity of any particular category. This is infinitely more true for the problems that the socialist reconstruction of society will pose and that cannot be solved or even be correctly posed without the deployment of the creative activity of the immense majority of individuals. For the real meaning of this reconstruction is, strictly speaking, that everything must be reexamined and refashioned: machines, factories, articles of consumption, houses, educational systems, political institutions, museums, ideas, and science itself—according to the needs of the workers and according to their view of things. Only they can be the judges of what these needs are and of the means of satisfying them. For even if on a particular point the experts have a “better” idea, such an idea will be worthless so long as those it should interest do not see the correctness or necessity of it. Any attempt to impose upon people solutions to the problems of their own lives, solutions they do not themselves approve of, automatically and immediately makes these solutions monstrously false ones.

### *The Development of the Proletariat toward Socialism*

Is socialism, conceived in this way, a historically reasonable prospect? Is it a possibility that exists within modern society? Or is it just a dream? Is the proletariat just something to be exploited, a modern class of industrial slaves that periodically breaks out in fruitless revolts? Or do the conditions of its existence and struggle against capitalism lead it to develop a consciousness—i.e., an attitude, a mentality, ideas and ways of acting—whose content tends toward socialism?

The answers to these questions are to be found in the analysis of the real history of the proletariat, its life in production, its political movements, and its activity during periods of revolution. And this analysis in turn leads to the overthrow of traditional ideas about socialism, labor demands, and forms of organization.

First, the proletariat’s struggle against capitalism is neither solely one of “making demands” nor solely “political”; it begins at the point of production. It does not simply concern the redistribution of the social product or, at the other end of the scale, the general organization of society. From the outset, it opposes the fundamental reality of capitalism, the relations of production within the enterprise. The so-called rationalization of capitalist production is nothing but a web of contradictions. It consists in organizing work without the involvement of the workers, abolishing their human role—which is inherently absurd even from the point of view of productive efficiency. It aims untiringly at increasing their exploitation—which forces them to oppose it nonstop.

Far from being concerned only with wages, the workers’ struggle against this method of organization dominates every aspect and every moment of the life of the firm. First of all, the conflict between workers and management over wages cannot but have an immediate impact on every aspect of the organization of work.<sup>5</sup> In the next place, the workers, whatever their wage level, are led inevitably to oppose methods of production that lead to their daily, ever more intolerable dehumanization. This struggle does not and cannot remain purely negative, its aim is not simply to limit exploitation. Production must take place

whatever happens, and the workers, at the same time as they are struggling against the norms and the coercive bureaucratic apparatus, maintain a work discipline and instaurate a system of cooperation opposed in spirit as well as in practice to the rules of organization of the factory. They thus take over certain aspects of the management of production at the same time as they establish in what they do new principles for the ordering of human relations in production; they oppose the capitalist morality of maximum individual gain and tend to replace it with a new morality of solidarity and equality.<sup>6</sup>

This struggle is not accidental, nor is it connected with a particular form of organization of capitalist production. Every time capitalism makes major changes in the techniques and methods of production in order to ward off this struggle, it rises up again. The workers' tendencies toward self-management that this struggle brings out is universal both in range and depth. It exists in Russia as well as in the United States and in England as well as in France. Although the proletariat's struggle inside production remains "hidden," for it allows neither formal organization nor a formulated program nor overt action, its content can be found in the activity of the masses each time a revolutionary crisis shakes capitalist society. In every factory in the world workers fight nonstop against work norms; the abolition of norms was one of the most important demands of the Hungarian workers' councils in 1956. Like the commune and the soviets, workers' councils were constituted on the principle that the elected delegates were liable to recall. Shop stewards in English factories are always liable to recall by the workers who elected them, and they must give these workers regular accounts of their activities.

The socialist conception of society, born in the obscurity of the day-to-day lives of producers, bursts into broad daylight during the working-class revolutions that have marked the history of capitalism. Far from rising up simply against poverty and exploitation, in the course of these events the proletariat poses the problem of how to organize the whole of society in a new way and provides positive answers. The Commune of 1871, the soviets of 1905 and 1917, the factory committees in Russia in 1917-18, the factory councils in Germany in 1919-20, and the workers' councils in Hungary in 1956 were organizations formed to combat the ruling class and its state and at the same time new forms of human organization based on principles radically opposed to those of bourgeois society. These creations of the proletariat were a practical refutation of the ideas that have dominated man's political organization for centuries. They have shown the possibility of a centralized social organization that, instead of politically expropriating the population for the benefit of its "representatives," on the contrary places these representatives under the permanent control of their electors and for the first time in modern history achieves democracy on the scale of society as a whole. In the same way, workers' management of production, sought by the Russian factory committees in 1917, was achieved by the Spanish workers in 1936-37 and proclaimed by the Hungarian workers' councils in 1956 as one of their basic objectives.

But the development of the proletariat toward socialism shows itself not only in factory life or during revolutions. From the beginning of its history, the pro-

letariat has struggled against capitalism in an explicit way, that is to say, by forming political organizations. The tendency of the working class or of broad strata of workers to organize themselves in order to struggle in an overt and permanent fashion is a theme running through the whole of modern history. If this is not recognized, one is doomed to understand as little about the proletariat and socialism as if the commune or the councils were never known. For it shows that the proletariat has the need and at the same time the ability to argue the question of social organization as such not simply during a revolutionary explosion, but systematically and permanently; to go beyond the territory of its economic defense and to oppose bourgeois ideology with its own conception of society; to leave the confines of the workshop, the firm, and even the nation and argue the question of power on an international scale. It is in fact entirely false to say that the working class has created only economic and occupational associations (trade unions). In certain countries, such as Germany, the workers began by building a political movement, and the trade unions emanated from this. In the majority of other cases, as in the Latin countries and even in England, the trade unions themselves originally were by no means purely trade unions; their proclaimed aim was the abolition of the wages system. It is just as false to claim that the workers' political organizations were the exclusive creation of intellectuals, as has been said, sometimes approvingly and sometimes disapprovingly. Even where intellectuals played a predominant role in their formation, these organizations could never have acquired any sort of reality if workers had not belonged to them in great numbers, sustained them with their experience, their activity, and often their blood, and if a large majority of the working class had not long seen their interests expressed in the programs of these organizations.

### *The Contradictory Character of the Proletariat's Development*

There is, therefore, an autonomous development of the proletariat toward socialism that originates in the workers' struggle against the capitalist organization of production, finds expression in the formation of political organizations, and culminates in revolution. But this development is not the mechanical, automatic result of the objective conditions in which the proletariat lives, nor is it a biological evolution, an inevitable process of maturation that provides for its own development. It is a historical process and essentially a process of struggle. Workers are not born socialists, nor are they miraculously transformed into such merely by entering into a factory. They become, or more exactly they make themselves, socialists in the course of and out of their struggle against capitalism.

Nevertheless, we must see exactly what this struggle is, where it is fought, and what the true enemy is. The proletariat is not only fighting capitalism as a force outside itself. If it were just a question of the physical power of the exploiters, their State and their army, exploitative society would have been abolished long ago, for it possesses no power of its own beyond the work of those it exploits. It survives only insofar as it succeeds in making them accept their position. Its most formidable weapons are not those it uses intentionally, but those it

is automatically provided with by the objective condition of the exploited class, by the way things are set up in present society, and by the way social relations are organized so as to perpetually recreate its own bases. The proletariat is not only systematically indoctrinated by the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy. More generally, it is severely deprived of culture. It is robbed of its own past, since it can know only what the ruling classes decide to let it see of its history and its past struggles. It is robbed of awareness of itself as a universal class as a result of the local, occupational, and national factors of isolation engendered by the present social structure—and of its present condition, since all the information media are under the control of the ruling classes.

In spite of its position as an exploited class, the proletariat struggles against these factors and makes up for them. It develops a systematic distrust of bourgeois indoctrination and undertakes a critique of its contents. It tends to absorb the culture from which it is cut off in a thousand ways at the same time as it creates the beginnings of a new culture. From a book-learned point of view, it is unaware of its own past, but it finds before it its essential results in the form of the conditions for its present action.

But by far the greatest obstacle in the way of the development of the proletariat is the perpetual rebirth of the spirit and reality of capitalism within the proletariat itself. The workers are not strangers to capitalism; they are born into a capitalist society, live in it, take part in it, and make it work. Capitalist ideas, norms, and attitudes tend constantly to invade their minds and as long as the present society lasts it will not be any different. The situation of the proletariat is absolutely contradictory, for at the same time that it gives birth to the elements of a new human organization and of a new culture it can never free itself entirely from the capitalist society in which it lives. The strongest hold of society is found mainly in the fields that are given the least thought; they are the time-honored habits, the “self-evident” axioms of bourgeois common sense that no one calls into question, inertia, and society’s systematically organized inhibition of people’s activity and creativity. During a revolution, capitalism may be defeated militarily and yet remain victorious if, in order to defeat it and under the pretext of “efficiency,” the revolutionary army or the production process is organized along capitalist lines (as was the case in Russia in 1918-21), for this “moral” victory for the old society soon will manage to transform itself into complete victory. The workers may score the enormous victory of building a revolutionary organization that expresses their aspirations—and immediately turn victory into defeat if they think that once the organization is built it remains only for them to have confidence in it for it to solve their problems.

The proletariat’s struggle against capitalism is, therefore, in its most important aspect, a struggle of the working class against itself, a struggle to free itself from what persists in it of the society it is combating. The history of the labor movement is the history of the development of the proletariat through this struggle, a development that has not been a continuous advance but an unequal and contradictory process of gaining and losing ground, containing entire periods of regression.<sup>7</sup>

## 2: The Degeneration of Working-Class Organizations

The evolution of workers' organizations can be understood only in this context. For a century the proletariat of all countries has been setting up organizations to help them in their struggle, and all these organizations, whether trade unions or political parties, ultimately have degenerated and become integrated into the system of exploitation. In this respect it matters little whether they have become purely and simply instruments of the State and of capitalist society (like the reformist organizations), or whether (like the Stalinist organizations) they aim to bring about a transformation of this society, concentrating economic and political power in the hands of a bureaucratic stratum while leaving unaltered the exploitation of the workers. The main point is that such organizations have become the strongest opponents of their original aim: the emancipation of the proletariat.

Of course this is not a question of "mistakes" or of "betrayals" on the part of leaders. Leaders who "err" or "betray" are sooner or later removed from the organizations they lead. But the degeneration of workers' organizations has gone hand in hand with their bureaucratization, i.e., with the formation within them of a stratum of irremovable and uncontrollable leaders. Thenceforth the policy of these organizations expresses the interests and aspirations of this bureaucracy.<sup>8</sup> To understand the degeneration of these organizations is to understand how a bureaucracy can be born out of the labor movement.

Briefly, bureaucratization has meant that the fundamental social relationship of modern capitalism, the relationship between directors and executants, has reproduced itself within the labor movement, and in two forms: first, within the workers' organizations, which have responded to the enlargement and multiplication of their tasks by adopting a bourgeois model of organization, instaurating a greater and greater division of labor until a new stratum of leaders has crystallized, separate from the mass of militants who from then on are reduced to the role of executants; and second, between working-class organizations and the proletariat itself. The function these organizations have gradually taken on has been to lead the working class in its own, well-defined interest — and most of the time, the working class has agreed to rely on these organizations and carry out their instructions. And so we have arrived at a complete negation of what was the essence of a socialist movement, namely, the idea of the autonomy of the proletariat.

This evolution has a counterpart in the corresponding evolution of revolutionary theory and ideology, made possible by the initially contradictory character of Marxism itself. In a sense, nothing of what has been said here about workers' management and the autonomy of the proletariat is new. It all goes back to Marx's formula, "The emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the workers themselves"; in other words, emancipation will take place only insofar as the workers themselves decide the means and the ends of their struggle. This intuition of autonomy is in keeping with the deepest and most positive aspects of Marx's work: the central importance he accorded to the

analysis of the relations of production in the capitalist factory, the radical critique of bourgeois ideology in all its aspects and even of the traditional notion of “theory,” and the vision of socialism as a new reality whose elements are beginning to appear in the lives and attitudes of the workers even now.

Yet Marxism, itself born in capitalist society, has not freed itself, and could not free itself completely from the culture in which it grew up. Its position—like the position of any revolutionary ideology and like the situation of the proletariat until the revolution—remains contradictory. “The ruling ideas of each epoch are the ideas of its ruling class” does not simply mean that those ideas are physically the most widespread or the most widely accepted. It also means they tend to be assented to, partially and unconsciously, by the very people who oppose them the most violently. In the theoretical sphere no less than in the practical sphere, the struggle of the revolutionary movement to free itself from the hold of capitalism is a permanent struggle.

### *The Decline of Revolutionary Theory*

Very quickly the idea began to catch on that Marxism was the science of society and revolution. Attempts were made to present it as the synthesis and continuation of the creations of bourgeois culture (German classical philosophy, English political economy, and French utopian socialism), ignoring the fact that the prime feature in Marx’s work was precisely his overthrow of the fundamental postulates of that culture. This quite naturally led to it being said, in consequence, that socialist political consciousness has to be introduced into the working class “from the outside,” for “modern socialist consciousness can only arise upon a basis of deep scientific knowledge” and “the vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the petty bourgeois intelligentsia.”<sup>9</sup>

Although these formulations of Kautsky’s were taken up by Lenin, they are not in any way the exclusive attribute of bolshevism; they also express the typical attitude of the leaders of the Second International and of the reformists.<sup>10</sup> But their spirit is found in Marx himself. The debasement of revolutionary theory is symbolized by the gap between the subtitle of *Capital* (“a critique of political economy”—not “a critique of bourgeois political economy” but a critique of the very notion of political economy, of the very idea that there is a “science” of political economy) and what it became during the course of its elaboration: an attempt to establish the “laws of movement of the capitalist economy.” In the hands of his epigones the idea was further transformed into a scientific proof that the downfall of capitalism and the victory of socialism were inevitable and “guaranteed by natural laws.”<sup>11</sup> The Marxist theory now tries to reproduce the model of the natural sciences in relation to society—which comes down to saying that it borrows its logical structure from the bourgeois thought of its period, just as it borrows its method of exposition from bourgeois culture. Conceived in this way, it can only in fact be expounded by intellectual specialists, cut off from the proletariat. Even its basic premises, in the final analysis, reflect basically bourgeois ideas.

In the strict sense, the economic theory expounded in *Capital* is based on the

postulate that capitalism has managed completely and effectively to transform the worker—who appears there only as labor power—into a commodity; therefore the use value of labor power—the use the capitalist makes of it—is, as for any commodity, completely determined by the user, since its exchange value—wages—is determined solely by the laws of the market and in the first place by the production costs of labor power. This postulate is necessary for there to be a “science of economics” along the lines of the physico-mathematical model Marx followed to an increasing degree during the course of the exposition of *Capital*. But he contradicts the most essential fact of capitalism, namely, that the use value and exchange value of labor power are objectively indeterminate; they are determined rather by the struggle between labor and capital both in production and in society. Here is the ultimate root of the “objective” contradictions of capitalism (see “On the Content of Socialism, III”). The attempt to make them variables whose behavior is completely determined by objective laws leads, not as Marx and generations of Marxists after him thought, to the proof of an “inevitable” crisis of capitalism, but on the contrary, to the “proof” of the latter’s permanence. There would be no kind of historically important crisis if the proletariat remained completely passive [*se laissait faire à 100%*], as *Capital* postulates. The paradox is that Marx, the “inventor” of class struggle, wrote a monumental work on phenomena determined by this struggle in which the struggle itself was entirely absent.

It is hardly necessary to point out the degree to which such a conception is in contradiction to the idea of a conscious socialist revolution carried out by the masses. The latter would then indeed only have the role of supplying a verification of what the theory had already deduced a priori.<sup>12</sup>

Revolutionary politics tended in this vision to be transformed into a *technique*. Just as the engineer applies the science of the physicist under given conditions and with certain ends in view, so the revolutionary politician applies the conclusions of the “scientific” theory of revolution in given conditions. Stalin, characterizing Lenin as the “brilliant engineer on the locomotive of history,” was only expressing this idea with the crushing banality of which he alone was capable.

### *The Debasement of the Party Program and of the Function of the Party*

The technical aspects of traditional revolutionary theory gradually assume prime importance in the programs of political organizations. On the one hand, the objectives of the proletariat can and should be determined by the theory; the emancipation of the proletariat will be the work of the technicians of the revolution correctly applying their theory in given circumstances. On the other hand, what *this* theory allows theoreticians to grasp are solely the “objective” elements in the evolution of society, and socialism itself seems more and more bereft of all its human content and increasingly like a simple, “objective,” external transformation; in its essentials, it comes to appear like a mere modification of certain economic arrangements out of which everything else would result as a by-product at some indeterminate future date. Exclusive preoccupation with the distribution of the social product as well as with the regulation of property and

of the overall organization of the economy (“nationalization” and “planning”) thus becomes inevitable, and the fact that socialism must mean above all a radical upheaval in the relationships between people, whether in production or in politics, is completely masked over.

And if socialism is a scientific truth to which specialists obtain access through their theoretical expositions, it follows that the function of the revolutionary party would be to bring socialism to the proletariat. The latter could not reach it through its own experience; at the very most it could recognize the party that incarnates this truth as the representative of the general interests of humanity—and support it. There could be no question of its having any control over the party except through its passivity and refusal to follow it. Even then the party would have to conclude simply that it was unable to make its program concrete enough or its propaganda convincing enough—or that it was mistaken in its “appreciation of the situation”; but it could not learn much from the working class about anything basic. The party would possess the truth about socialism since it possesses the theory that alone leads to it. It is therefore the rightful leader of the proletariat, and it must become so in fact, since decision making can belong only to the specialists in the science of revolution. Insofar as it is permitted at all, democracy then is only an instructive procedure or an adjustment justified by the “imperfect” nature of revolutionary science. But only the party knows and can decide what the correct dose is.

### *The Revolutionary Party Organized on a Capitalist Model*

This view, or more exactly this mentality, finds its counterpart within the organization in its mode of operation, in the type of work it carries out, and in the relationships that are instaurated inside it. The action of the organization will be correct if it conforms with the theory or at least with the art or technique of “politics,” which has its specialists, too. Whatever the degree of formal democracy that exists within the organization, the militants will be aware that it is for the specialists to assess the objective situation and to deduce from it the line that must be followed; hence, all year long they will do nothing but carry out orders formulated by the political specialists. The dividing up of tasks, which is indispensable wherever there is a need for cooperation, becomes a real division of labor, the labor of giving orders being separate from that of carrying them out. Once instaurated, this division between directors and executants tends to broaden and deepen by itself. The leaders specialize in their role and become indispensable while those who carry out orders become absorbed in their concrete tasks. Deprived of information, of the general view of the situation, and of the problems of organization, arrested in their development by their lack of participation in the overall life of the Party, the organization’s rank-and-file militants less and less have the means or the possibility of having any control over those at the top.

This division of labor is supposed to be limited by “democracy.” But democracy, which should mean that *the majority rules [dirige]*, is reduced to meaning that the majority *designates its rulers*; copied in this way from the model of bour-



geois parliamentary democracy, drained of any real meaning, it quickly becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of the rulers. The base does not run the organization just because once a year it elects delegates who designate the central committee, no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-type republic because they periodically elect deputies who designate the government.

Let us consider, for example, “democratic centralism” as it is supposed to function in an ideal Leninist party. That the central committee is designated by a “democratically elected” congress makes no difference since, once it is elected, it is de facto and de jure the absolute ruler of the organization. It is not only that it has complete (statutory) control over the body of the Party (and can dissolve the base organizations, kick out militants, etc.) or that, under such conditions, it can determine the composition of the next congress. The central committee could use its powers in an honorable way, these powers could be reduced; the members of the Party might enjoy “political rights” such as being able to express themselves in internal and even outside publications, to form factions, etc. Fundamentally, this would not change the situation, for the central committee would still remain the organ that defines the political line of the organization and controls its application from top to bottom, that, in a word, has a permanent monopoly on the job of leadership. The expression of opinions only has a limited value once the way the group functions prevents this opinion from forming on solid bases, i.e., permanent *participation* in the organization’s activities and in the solution of problems that arise. If the way the organization is run makes the solution of general problems the specific task and permanent work of a separate category of militants, only their opinion will, or will appear, to count to the others. And this situation will carry further into the political tendencies that exist within the Party. Under such conditions, a congress meeting at regular intervals is no more “democratic” than parliamentary elections; indeed, both boil down in effect to inviting electors to voice their opinions from time to time on problems from which they are removed the rest of the time, while moreover taking away from them all means of having any control over what happens as a result.

This criticism applies not only to bolshevism, but also to social-democratic organizations and trade unions of all kinds. In this respect, the difference between a Stalinist and a reformist party is comparable to that between a totalitarian regime and a bourgeois “democratic” one. Formal individual rights may be greater in the second case but this makes no difference in the actual structure of power, which in both instances is the exclusive power of a particular category of people.

### *The Objective Conditions for Bureaucratization*

The phenomenon of degeneration and bureaucratization that working-class organizations undergo is a total one, embracing every aspect of their existence. It is a process of debasement just as much in revolutionary theory as in the program, activities, function, and structure of these organizations, and the work that militants accomplish in them.<sup>13</sup>

This does not mean that their actual historical evolution is the result of the

debasement of ideas in the heads of individuals. This debasement is only the expression of the persistence of capitalism and capitalist ways of thinking and acting within the labor movement. It means that the movement has not managed to free itself from the hold of the society in which it was born, and that it is falling under its indirect influence again at the very moment it thinks it is putting up its most radical opposition to it.

That this hold had a basis in the totality of productive, economic, political, and ideological relationships of the established society and that in particular the bureaucratic evolution of the workers' organizations has been conditioned by the objective evolution of capitalism is certain. A reformist bureaucracy is inconceivable except in a developing capitalist economy that makes such reformism possible. A "revolutionary" or "totalitarian" bureaucracy such as the Stalinist bureaucracy is inconceivable except in a situation of permanent crisis in society that the traditional ruling classes are incapable of solving. More generally, a bureaucracy of any significant size in a workers' organization is inconceivable without a corresponding degree of concentration in the areas of production and statification of economic life. Both business enterprises and the labor force are concentrated, while the organizational form of huge trade unions easily prevents any initiative on the part of its members. And State intervention in economic and social life offers the bureaucracy an ideal terrain on which to carry out its activity, both with respect to economic grievances as well as on the political level.

This type of analysis is indispensable but incomplete and unsatisfactory. It would be false to present the bureaucratization of workers' organizations simply as a *result* of the evolution of capitalism toward concentration and statification. Very early on, the action of the proletariat or of "its" organizations played a determining role in the evolution of modern society so that after a certain point "cause" and "effect" can no longer be distinguished. Bureaucratic organizations have transformed their social environment so as to adapt it to their conditions of existence, and they continue to do so. Everything an analysis of this sort teaches us shows us that the objective situation makes bureaucratic degeneration possible (which we knew already), but it does not teach us that it makes it inevitable. And as far as revolutionary action in the future is concerned, it is of little use. It would be vain, for example, to claim to foresee a future evolution of events or conditions that would render bureaucratization "objectively impossible."<sup>14</sup>

It is certain that capitalist society will always leave the possibility open for a leading section of the exploited classes to become integrated into the system of exploitation. It is also certain that the tendencies favoring the birth and growth of bureaucracy in workers' organizations are the prevailing tendencies of modern capitalism, which is becoming more and more a bureaucratic capitalism every day. Objective analysis is of the first importance, for it shows that bureaucratization, by no means an accidental or passing phenomenon, is a factor with which the revolutionary movement will always have to reckon. But it does not suffice to explain this phenomenon or guide our action.

This can be seen better by looking at a particularly important example. One's tendency is to present the bureaucratization of working-class organizations as the *inevitable* result of their numerical expansion: trade unions or parties num-

bering hundreds of thousands of members cannot, it is thought, organize, coordinate, and centralize their activities except by setting up organs specifically charged with these tasks, and hence by making leadership into a separate job entrusted to individuals who devote themselves to it professionally.

The sterility of such considerations is immediately noticeable; if things were so, the construction of a nonbureaucratic workers' organization, however large, would be impossible—and that of a socialist society too, probably. For its reasoning boils down to the assertion that the problem of centralization can be solved only by bureaucracy. But we see right away that this "objective" analysis is in no way objective, for before the start it has already adopted the most deeply rooted of bourgeois prejudices. What is objective is the *problem* of centralization that arises inevitably in the modern world. To this problem there are two solutions—and here objectivity ends. According to the bourgeois-bureaucratic solution, centralization is the particular responsibility of a particular stratum of leaders. This is the response workers' organizations have in the end subscribed to, and it is the one the argument set forth earlier implicitly accepts. But in the course of its struggles the working class has solved the problem of centralization in a completely different fashion. A general meeting of strikers, an elected strike committee, the commune, the soviet, the factory council—that's centralization. The proletarian response to the problem of centralization is direct democracy and the election of recallable delegates. And no one can prove that it would have been impossible for workers' organizations to solve the problem of centralization with the inspiration of this response rather than the bourgeois response.

In fact, the proletariat has on a number of occasions tried to organize itself in its own way, even in "normal" times. The first English trade unions practiced what Lenin called primitive democracy, contemptuously in *What Is to Be Done?* and admiringly in *State and Revolution*. These attempts could only disappear sooner or later. The vanguard, which played a prime role in the formation of these organizations, did not see organization in this way; all the same it could never have carried its point of view if the working class itself had not accepted it. And this allows us to see another essential aspect of all these problems.

### *The Role of the Proletariat in the Degeneration of Working-Class Organizations*

Degeneration means that the working-class organization tends to become separate from the working class and an organ apart, its de facto and de jure leadership. But this does not come about *because* of defects in the structure of these organizations or their mistaken ideas or some sort of an evil spell cast on organization as such. These negative features reflect the failure of these organizations, which in turn is only an aspect of the failure of the proletariat itself. When a director/executant relationship is set up between the trade union or party and the proletariat, it means that the proletariat is allowing a relationship of the capitalist type to be instaurated within itself.

Hence degeneration is not a phenomenon peculiar to working-class organizations. It is just one of the expressions of the way capitalism survives within the proletariat; capitalism expresses itself not in the corruption of leaders by money,

but as an ideology, as a type of social structure and as a set of relations between people. It is a manifestation of the immaturity of the proletariat vis-à-vis socialism. It corresponds to a phase in the labor movement and, even more generally, to a constant tendency toward integration into the system of exploitation or toward aiming for power for its own sake, which is expressed in the proletariat in symmetrical fashion as a tendency toward relying, consciously or passively, on the organization for a solution to its problems.

In the same way, the Party's claim that in possessing theory it possesses the truth and thereby should take the lead in everything would not have any real appeal if it did not make use of the conviction shared by the proletariat—and daily reproduced by life under capitalism—that general questions are the department of specialists and that its own experience of production and society is “unimportant.” These two tendencies express one and the same sense of frustration and failure; they originate in the same facts and the same ideas and are impossible and inconceivable one without the other. Of course, we should judge differently the politician who wants to impose his point of view by all possible means and the worker who is totally incapable of finding a reply to his flow of words or of matching his cunning, and even more differently the leader who “betrays” and the worker who is “betrayed”; but we must not forget that the notion of treason has no meaning in such relationships. No one can indefinitely betray people who do not want to be betrayed and who do what is necessary to prevent their being betrayed any longer. Understanding this allows us to appreciate what all this proletarian fetishism and all these antiorganizational obsessions that recently have taken hold of certain people are really all about. When trade-union leaders carry through reformist policies, they only succeed because of the apathy, the acquiescence, and the insufficient response of the working masses. When, for four years, the French proletariat allows the Algerians to be massacred and tortured and only feebly stirs when the question of its being mobilized or of its wages becomes involved, it is very superficial to say that it is all a crime of Mollet's or of Thorez's<sup>15</sup> or of organizational bureaucratization in general.

The enormous role played by organizations themselves in this question does not mean that the working class plays no part at all. The working class is neither a totally irresponsible entity nor the absolute subject of history; and those who only see in the class's evolution the problem of the degeneration of its organizations paradoxically want to make it both at once. To hear them tell it, the proletariat draws everything from itself—and plays no part in the degeneration of workers' organizations. No, as a first approximation we should say that the proletariat only gets the organizations it is capable of having.

The situation of the proletariat forces it always to undertake and continuously recommence its struggle against capitalist society. In the course of this struggle it produces new contents and new forms—socialist contents and forms, for to fight capitalism means to put forward objectives, principles, standards, and forms of organization radically opposed to established society. But as long as capitalism endures, the proletariat will remain partly under its hold.

The effect of this hold can be seen particularly clearly in workers' organizations. When capitalism takes hold of them, these organizations degenerate—

which goes hand in hand with their bureaucratization. As long as capitalism lasts, there will always be “objective conditions” making this degeneration possible. But this does not mean that bureaucratization is fated. People make their own history. Objective conditions simply allow a result that is the product of man’s actions and attitudes to happen. When they have occurred, these actions have taken a very well defined path. On the one hand, revolutionary militants have partly remained or have returned to being prisoners of capitalist social relationships and ideology. On the other, the proletariat has remained just as much under this hold and has agreed to act as the executant of its organizations.

### 3: A New Period Begins for the Labor Movement

Under what conditions can this situation change in the future? First, the experience of the preceding period will have to allow revolutionary militants and workers alike to become aware of the contradictory and, basically, reactionary elements in their own and the other’s conceptions and attitudes. Militants will have to overthrow these traditional ideas and come around to viewing revolutionary theory, program, politics, activity, and organization in a new way, in a socialist way. On the other hand, the proletariat will have to come around to seeing its struggle as an autonomous struggle and the revolutionary organization not as a leadership responsible for its fate but as one moment and one instrument in its struggle.

Do these conditions exist now? Is this overthrow of traditional ideas an effort of will, an inspiration, or a new, more correct theory? No, this overthrow is made possible from now on by one *great objective* fact, specifically, the bureaucratization of the labor movement. The action of the proletariat has produced a bureaucracy. This bureaucracy has become integrated into the system of exploitation. If the proletariat’s struggle against the bureaucracy continues, it will be turned not only against bureaucrats as persons but against bureaucracy as a system, as a type of social relationship, as a reality and an ideology corresponding to this reality.

This is an essential corollary to what was said earlier about the role of objective factors. There are no economic or other laws making bureaucratization henceforth impossible, but there is a development that has become objective, for society has become bureaucratized and so the proletariat’s struggle against this society can only be a struggle against bureaucracy. The destruction of bureaucracy is not “predestined,” just as the victory of the proletariat in its struggle is not “predestined” either. But the conditions for this victory are from now on satisfied by social reality, for awareness of the problems of bureaucracy no longer depends upon any theoretical arguments or upon any exceptional amount of lucidity; it can result from the daily experience of workers who encounter bureaucracy not as a potential threat in the distant future but as an enemy of flesh and bone, born of their very own activity.

*Proletariat and Bureaucracy in the Present Period*

The events of recent years show that the proletariat is gaining experience of bureaucratic organizations not as leadership groups that are “mistaken” or that “betray,” but in an infinitely more profound way.

Where these organizations are in power, as in Eastern Europe, the proletariat sees them of necessity as purely and simply the incarnation of the system of exploitation. When it manages to break the totalitarian yoke, its revolutionary struggle is not just directed *against* bureaucracy; it puts forward aims that express in positive terms the experience of bureaucratization. In 1953 the workers of East Berlin asked for a “metalworkers’ government” and later the Hungarian workers’ councils demanded workers’ management of production.<sup>16</sup>

In the majority of Western countries, the workers’ attitude toward bureaucratic organizations shows that they see them as foreign and alien institutions. In contrast to what was still happening at the end of the Second World War, in no industrialized country do workers still believe that “their” parties or trade unions are willing or able to bring about a fundamental change in their situation. They may “support” them by voting for them as a lesser evil; they may use them—this is often still the case as far as trade unions are concerned—as one uses a lawyer or the fire brigade. But rarely do they *mobilize* themselves for them or at their call, and never do they actively *participate* in them. Membership in trade unions may rise or fall, no one attends trade-union meetings. Parties can rely less and less on the active militancy of workers who are party members; they now function mainly through paid permanent staff made up of “left-wing” members of the petty bourgeoisie and intellectuals. In the eyes of the workers, these parties and trade unions are part of the established order—more or less rotten than the rest—but basically the same as them. When workers’ struggles erupt they often do so outside the bureaucratic organizations and sometimes directly *against* them.<sup>17</sup>

We therefore have entered a new phase in the development of the proletariat that can be dated, if you like, from 1953; this is the beginning of a historical period during which the proletariat will try to rid itself of the remnants of its creations of 1890 and 1917. Henceforth, when the workers put forward their own aims and seriously struggle to achieve them, they will be able to do so only outside, and most often in conflict with, bureaucratic organizations. This does not mean that the latter will disappear. For as long as the proletariat accepts the system of exploitation, organizations expressing this state of affairs will exist and will continue to serve as instruments for the integration of the proletariat into capitalist society. Without them, capitalist society can no longer possibly function. But because of this very fact, each struggle will tend to set the workers against these bureaucratized organizations; and if these struggles develop, new organizations will rise up from the proletariat itself, for sections of wage laborers, salaried workers, and intellectuals will feel the need to act in a systematic and permanent fashion to help the proletariat to achieve its new objectives.

*The Need for a New Organization*

If the working class is to enter a new phase of activity and development, immense practical and ideological needs will arise.

The proletariat will need organs that will allow it to express its experiences and opinions beyond the workshop and the office where the capitalist structure of society at present confines them and that will enable it to smash the bourgeois and bureaucratic monopoly over the means of expression. It will need information centers to tell it about what is happening among various groups of workers, within the ruling classes, in society in general, and in other countries. It will need organs for ideological struggle against capitalism and the bureaucracy capable of drawing out a positive socialist conception of the problems of society. It will feel the need for a socialist perspective to be defined, for the problems faced by a working class in power to be brought out and worked out, and for the experience of past revolutions to be drawn out and put at the disposal of present generations. It will need material means and instruments to carry out these tasks as well as interoccupational, interregional, and international liaisons to bring people and ideas together. It will need to attract office workers, technicians, and intellectuals into its camp and to integrate them into its struggle.

The working class cannot directly satisfy these needs itself except in a period of revolution. The working class can bring about a revolution "spontaneously," make the most far-reaching demands, invent forms of struggle of incomparable effectiveness, and create organs to express its power. But the working class as such, in a totally undifferentiated state, will not, for example, produce a national workers' newspaper, the absence of which is sorely felt today; it will be workers and militants who will produce it, and who will of necessity organize to produce it. It will not be the working class as a whole that spreads the news of a particular struggle fought in a particular place; if organized workers and militants don't do it, then this example will be lost, for it will remain unknown. In periods of normalcy, the working class as such will not absorb within itself the technicians and intellectuals whom capitalist society tends to separate from the workers all their lives; and without this sort of integration a host of problems facing the revolutionary movement in a modern society will remain insoluble. Neither will the working class as such nor intellectuals as such solve the problem of how to carry on a continuous elaboration of revolutionary theory and ideology, for such a resolution can only come about through a fusion of the experience of workers and the positive elements of modern culture. Now, the only place in contemporary society in which this fusion can take place is a revolutionary organization.

To work toward satisfying these needs therefore necessarily implies building an organization as large, as strong, and as effective as possible. We believe this organization can exist only under two conditions.

The first condition is that the working class recognize it as an indispensable tool in its struggle. Without substantial support from the working class the organization could not develop for better or for worse. The phobia about bureaucratization certain people are developing at the moment fails to recognize a basic

fact: There is very little room for a new bureaucracy, objectively (the existing bureaucracies satisfy the needs of the system of exploitation) as well as, and above all, in the consciousness of the proletariat. Or else, if the proletariat again allowed a bureaucratic organization to develop and once more fell under its hold, the conclusion would have to be that all the ideas on which we base ourselves are false, at any rate as far as the present historical period and probably as far as socialist prospects are concerned. For this would mean that the proletariat was incapable of establishing a socialist relationship with a political organization, that it cannot solve the problem of its relations with the sphere of ideology, with intellectuals, and with other social groups on a healthy and fruitful basis, and therefore, ultimately, that it would find the problem of the "State" an insoluble one.

But such an organization will only be recognized by the proletariat as an indispensable tool in its struggle if—and this is the second condition—it learns all the lessons of the previous historical period and if it puts itself at the level of the proletariat's present experience and needs. Such an organization will be able to develop and indeed exist only if its activity, structure, ideas, and methods correspond to the antibureaucratic consciousness of the workers and express it and only if it is able to define revolutionary politics, theory, action, and work on new bases.

### *Revolutionary Politics*

The end, and at the same time the means, of revolutionary politics is to contribute to the development of the consciousness of the proletariat in every sphere and especially where the obstacles to this development are greatest: with respect to the problem of society taken as a whole. But awareness is not recording and playing back, learning ideas brought in from the outside, or contemplating ready-made truths. It is activity, creation, the capacity to produce. It is therefore not a matter of "raising consciousness" through lessons, no matter how high the quality of the contents or of the teacher; it is rather to contribute to the development of the consciousness of the proletariat as a creative faculty.

Not only then is it not a question of revolutionary politics imposing itself on the proletariat or of manipulating it, but also it cannot be a question of preaching to the proletariat or of teaching it a "correct theory." The task of revolutionary politics is to contribute to the formation of the consciousness of the proletariat by contributing those elements of which it is dispossessed. But the proletariat can come to exert control over these elements, and, what is more important, it can effectively integrate them into its own experience and therefore make something out of them, only if they are organically connected with it. This is completely the opposite of "simplification" or popularization, and implies rather a continual deepening of the questions asked. Revolutionary politics must constantly show how society's most general problems are contained in the daily life and activity of the workers, and inversely, how the conflicts tearing apart their lives are, in the last analysis, of the same nature as those that divide society. It must show the connection between the solutions the workers offer to prob-



lems they face at work and those that are applicable to society as a whole. In short, it must extract the socialist content in what is constantly being created by the proletariat (whether it is a matter of a strike or of a revolution), formulate it coherently, propagate it, and show its universal import.

This is not to suggest that revolutionary politics is anything like a passive expression or reflection of working-class consciousness. This consciousness contains something of everything, both socialist elements and capitalist ones as we have shown at great length. There is Budapest and there are also large numbers of French workers who treat Algerians like *bougnoules*;<sup>18</sup> there are strikes against hierarchy and there are interunion jurisdictional disputes. Revolutionary politics can and must combat capitalism's continuous penetration into the proletariat, for revolutionary politics is merely one aspect of the struggle of the working class against itself. It necessarily implies making a *choice* among the things the working class produces, asks for, and accepts. The basis for this choice is revolutionary ideology and theory.

### *Revolutionary Theory*

The long-prevalent conception of revolutionary theory—the science of society and revolution, as elaborated by specialists and introduced into the proletariat by the party—is in direct contradiction to the very idea of a socialist revolution being the autonomous activity of the masses. But it is just as erroneous on the theoretical plane. There is no “proof” of the inevitable collapse of the system of exploitation.<sup>19</sup> There is even less “truth” in the possibility of socialism being established by a theoretical elaboration operating outside the concrete content created by the historic, everyday activity of the proletariat. The proletariat develops on its own toward socialism—otherwise there would be no prospect for socialism. The objective conditions for this development are given by capitalist society itself. But these conditions only establish the context and define the problems the proletariat will encounter in its struggle; they are a long way from determining the content of its answers to these problems. Its responses are a creation of the proletariat, for this class takes up the objective elements of the situation and at the same time transforms them, thereby opening up a previously unknown and unsuspected field of action and objective possibilities. The content of socialism is precisely this creative activity on the part of the masses that no theory ever could or ever will be able to anticipate. Marx could not have anticipated the commune (not as an event but as a form of social organization) nor Lenin the soviets, nor could either of them have anticipated worker's management. Marx could only draw conclusions from and recognize the significance of the action of the Parisian proletariat during the Commune—and he merits the great distinction of having shattered his own previously held views to do so. But it would be just as false to say that once these conclusions have been reached, the theory possesses the truth and can rigidify it in formulations that will remain valid indefinitely. These formulations will be valid only until the next phase of activity by the masses, for each time they again enter into action the masses tend

to go beyond their previous level of action, and thereby beyond the conclusions of previous theoretical elaborations.

Socialism is not a correct theory as opposed to false theories; it is the possibility of a new world rising out of the depths of society that will bring into question the very notion of "theory." Socialism is not a correct idea. It is a project for the transformation of history. Its content is that those who half the time are the objects of history will become wholly its subjects—which would be inconceivable if the meaning of this transformation were possessed by a particular group of individuals.

Consequently, the conception of revolutionary theory must be changed. It must be modified, in the first place, with respect to the ultimate source for its ideas and principles—which can be nothing else but the historic as well as day-to-day experience and action of the proletariat. All of economic theory has to be reconstructed around what is contained in embryo in the tendency of workers toward equality in pay; the entire theory of production around the informal organization of workers in the factory; all of political theory around the principles embodied in the soviets and the councils. It is only with the help of these landmarks that theory can illuminate and make use of what is of revolutionary value among the general cultural creations of contemporary society.

The conception of theory must be modified, in the second place, with respect to both its objective and function. This cannot be to churn out the eternal truths of socialism, but to assist in the struggle for the liberation of the proletariat and humanity. This does not mean that theory is a utilitarian appendage of revolutionary struggle or that its value is to be measured by the degree of effectiveness of propaganda. Revolutionary theory is itself an essential moment in the struggle for socialism and is such to the degree that it contains the truth. Not speculative or contemplative truth, but truth bound up with practice, truth that casts light upon a project for the transformation of the world. Its function, then, is to state explicitly, and on every occasion, the meaning of the revolutionary venture and of the workers' struggle; to shed light on the context in which this action is set, to situate the various elements in it and to provide an overall explanatory schema for understanding these elements and for relating them to each other; and to maintain the vital link between the past and the future of the movement. But above all, it is to elaborate the prospects for socialism. For revolutionary theory, the ultimate guarantor for the critique of capitalism and for the prospect of a new society is to be found in the activity of the proletariat, its opposition to established forms of social organization and its tendency to inaugurate new relationships between people. But theory can and must bring out the truths that spring from this activity by showing their universal validity. It must show that the proletariat's challenge to capitalist society expresses the deepest contradiction within that society; it must show the objective possibility of a socialist society. It therefore must define the socialist outlook as completely as possible at any given moment according to the experience and activity of the proletariat—and in return interpret this experience according to this outlook.

Indeed, the conception of theory must be modified with respect to the way it is elaborated. As an expression of what is universally valid in the experience of

the proletariat and as a fusion of that experience with the revolutionary elements in contemporary culture, revolutionary theory cannot be elaborated, as was done in the past, by a particular stratum of intellectuals. It will have no value, no consistency with what it elsewhere proclaims to be its essential principles unless it is constantly being replenished, in practice, by the experience of the workers as it takes shape in their day-to-day lives. This implies a radical break with the practice of traditional organizations. The intellectuals' monopoly over theory is not broken by the fact that a tiny group of workers are "educated" by the organization—and thus transformed into second-string intellectuals; on the contrary, this simply perpetuates the problem. The task the organization is up against in this sphere is to merge intellectuals with workers *as workers* as it is elaborating its views. This means that the questions asked, and the methods for discussing and working out these problems, must be changed so that it will be possible for the worker to take part. This is not a case of "the teacher making allowances," but rather the primary condition to be fulfilled if revolutionary theory is to remain adequate to its principles, its object, and its content. There obviously cannot be equal participation on all subjects; the important thing is that there be equal participation on the basic ones. Now, for revolutionaries, the first change to bring about concerns the question of what is a basic subject. It is clear that workers could not participate as workers and on the basis of their experience in a discussion on the falling rate of profit. It so happens, as if by accident, that this problem is, strictly speaking, unimportant (even scientifically). More generally, nonparticipation in traditional organizations has gone along with a conception of revolutionary theory as a "science" that has no connection with people's experiences except in its most remote consequences. What we are saying here leads us to adopt a diametrically opposed position; by definition, nothing can be of basic concern to revolutionary theory if there is no way of linking it up organically with the workers' own experience. It is also obvious that this connection is not always simple and direct and that the experience involved here is not experience reduced to pure immediacy. The mystification that there is some kind of "spontaneous process" through which the worker can, through an effortless and magic operation, find everything he needs to make a socialist revolution in the here and now of his own experience is the exact counterpart to the bureaucratic mystification it is trying to combat, and it is just as dangerous.

These considerations show that it is vain to talk of revolutionary theory outside a revolutionary organization. Only an organization formed as a revolutionary workers' organization, in which workers numerically predominate and dominate it on fundamental questions, and which creates broad avenues of exchange with the proletariat, thus allowing it to draw upon the widest possible experience of contemporary society—only an organization of this kind can produce a theory that will be anything other than the isolated work of specialists.

### *Revolutionary Action*

The task of the organization is not just to arrive at a conception—the clearest possible—of the revolutionary struggle and then keep it to itself. This concep-

tion has no meaning unless it is a moment in this struggle; it has no value unless it can aid in the workers' struggle and assist in the formation of their experience. These two aspects are inseparable. Unlike the intellectual, whose experiences are formed by reading, writing, and speculative thinking, workers can form their experiences only through their actions. The organization therefore can contribute to the formation of workers' experience only if (a) it acts in an exemplary fashion, and (b) it helps the workers to act in an effective and fruitful way.

Unless it wants to renounce its existence completely, the organization cannot renounce acting, nor can it give up trying to influence actions and events in a particular direction. No form of action considered in itself can be ruled out in advance. These forms of action can only be judged by their effectiveness in achieving the aim of the organization—which continues to be the lasting development of the consciousness of the proletariat. These forms range from the publication of journals and pamphlets to the issuing of leaflets calling for such and such an action and the promulgation of slogans that in a given historic situation can allow a rapid crystallization of the awareness of the proletariat's own aims and will to act. The organization can carry through this action coherently and consciously only if it has a point of view on the immediate as well as the historical problems confronting the working class and only if it defends this point of view before the working class—in other words, only if it acts according to a *program* that condenses and expresses the experience of the labor movement up to that point.

Three tasks facing the organization at present are highly urgent and require a more precise definition.

The first is to bring to expression the experience of the workers and to help them become aware of the awareness they already possess. Two enormous obstacles prevent workers from expressing themselves. The first is the material impossibility of expressing themselves as a result of the monopoly over the means of expression exercised by the bourgeoisie, the parties of the "Left," and the trade unions. The revolutionary organization will have to put its organs at the disposal of workers, whether organized or not. But there is a second, even more formidable obstacle: Even when they are given the material means to express themselves, the workers do not do so. At the root of this attitude is found the idea constantly spawned [*créée*] by bourgeois society and encouraged by "working-class" organizations that what workers have to say does not really matter. The conviction that the "great" problems of society are unrelated to working-class experience, and that they belong to the field of specialists and leaders, is constantly taking root in the proletariat; in the last analysis, this conviction is the essential condition for the survival of the system of exploitation. It is the duty of the revolutionary organization to combat this, first, by its critique of present society, showing in particular the bankruptcy of this system and the inability of its leaders to solve their problems; and then and above all, by showing the positive importance of the workers' experience and the answer this contains in embryo to the most general problems of society. It is only insofar as the idea is destroyed that what the workers have to say is insignificant, that workers will express themselves.

The second task of the organization is to place before the proletariat an overall conception of the problems of present-day society and, in particular, the problem of socialism. Workers find it hard to envision the possibility of workers' management of society and see rather the degradation the idea of socialism has suffered through its bureaucratic caricatures. Taken together, these difficulties constitute the main obstacles in the way of revolutionary action on the part of the proletariat in this period of deep crisis in the social relationships of capitalism. It is for the organization to rearouse in the proletariat this *awareness of the possibility of socialism*; without it, revolutionary development will be infinitely more difficult.

The organization's third task is to help the workers defend their immediate interests and position. As a result of the complete bureaucratization of trade unions in the great majority of cases and the inanity of any move aimed at replacing them by new and "improved" trade unions, today the revolutionary organization alone can take on an entire series of functions essential for the success and even the lodging of economic demands. These include the functions of inquiry, communication, and liaison; the basic material functions that go along with them; and finally, and especially, the functions involved in the systematic clarification and circulation of *exemplary* demands, organizational forms, and methods of conducting struggles that have been created by one or another category of workers. This action by the organization in no way denies the importance that autonomous, minority factions of militant workers in various companies might take on in the coming period. The action of such groupings cannot in the end be successful unless they manage to go beyond the narrow framework of the firm and expand onto the interoccupational and national levels; moreover, the organization can make a decisive contribution to the extension of their role. But what is most important, experience shows that such groupings will only remain passing phenomena unless they are animated by militants who are convinced of the necessity for permanent action and who, as a result of this conviction, link this action with problems that go beyond the situation of workers in their firm. These militants will find the organization an indispensable support for their action, and most often they will originate from this organization. In other words, the formation of minority factions within firms will most of the time be achieved as a result of the activity of the revolutionary organization.

### *The Structure of the Organization*

In this sphere too, the organization's inspiration can come only from the socialist structures created by the working class in the course of its history. It must let itself be guided by the principles on which the soviet and the factory council were founded, not copying such organizations literally, but adapting them to suit the conditions in which it is placed. This means:

1. That in deciding their own activities, grass-roots organs enjoy as much autonomy as is compatible with the general unity of action of the organization;

2. That direct democracy, i.e., collective decision making by all those involved, be applied wherever it is materially possible; and
3. That the central organs empowered to make decisions be composed of delegates elected from the grass-roots organs who are liable to recall at any time.

In other words, the principles of workers' management must govern the operation and structure of the organization. Apart from them, there are only capitalist principles, which, as we have seen, can only result in the establishment of capitalist relationships.

In particular, it is the problem of the relationship between centralization and decentralization that the organization must resolve on the basis of the principles of workers' management. The organization is a collective unit, in action and even in production; it therefore cannot exist without unity of action, and consequently all questions relating to the organization as a whole necessarily involve centralized decision making. "Centralized" does not mean that decisions are to be made by a central committee; on the contrary, they are to be made by the organization as a whole, either directly or through elected, recallable delegates, using the principle of majority vote. Furthermore, it is essential that within the framework of these central decisions, the grass-roots organs govern their own activities autonomously.

The confusion created by bureaucratic domination over the past thirty years has turned some people today against centralization as such (whether in a revolutionary organization or in a socialist society) and has led them to contrast it with democracy. Such an opposition is absurd. Feudalism was decentralized, and if Khrushchev's Russia became decentralized it would not make it any more democratic. On the other hand, a factory council is centralization itself. Democracy is only a form of centralization; it means simply that the *center* is the *totality* of those who take part and that decisions are made by a majority of these participants and not by any authority apart from them. Bolshevik "democratic centralism" was not *democratic* centralism, as we saw earlier. In reality, it works by assigning decision-making functions to a minority of leaders. The proletariat has always been centralist. This is as true of its historical actions (the commune, soviets, workers' councils) as of its current struggles. Likewise, it has been democratic, that is to say, a supporter of the rule of the majority. If the social origin of opposition to the majority principle is to be sought, it certainly will not be found in the working class.

Nevertheless, the problem of democracy in the organization concerns not only the form in which decisions are made but the entire process by which these decisions are arrived at. Democracy is meaningful only if those who are to make the decisions are able to do so in full knowledge of the relevant facts.<sup>20</sup> The problem of democracy, therefore, also embraces the problem of obtaining adequate information; but it does not involve only this, for it also includes the nature of the questions posed and the attitude of the participants toward these questions and toward the results of this or that decision. Finally, democracy is impossible without the active and permanent *participation* of all the members of the organization in its work and in its operation. Again, this participation does

not and cannot result from the psychological peculiarities of militants, such as their force of character or their enthusiasm. It depends above all on the type of work the organization proposes to them and on the way in which this work is conceived and carried out. If the work they do reduces them to the role of executants of decisions actually made by others, their participation will be infinitesimal. Even if these decisions are implemented with great devotion, the degree of participation necessarily will be only a small fraction of what it is potentially. It is therefore the degree of opportunity afforded by the organization to each of its members to participate in the output of the organization as a creative member of the group and to use his own experience to exert control over this output that will allow one to measure the degree of democracy the organization has been able to attain.

Can we claim, therefore, to have solved all problems once and for all? Can we say now that we are immune from the modes of thought of established society and that we have found the “recipe” for the organization to avoid all bureaucratization and for the proletariat to avoid all mistakes and defeats? To suppose this would be to understand nothing at all of what has been said, and indeed, to expect a reply of this sort would be to understand nothing at all about the type of questions asked. The reply to those who ask for guarantees that a new organization will not become bureaucratized is this: “You are already completely bureaucratized yourselves, you are the ideal infantry of a new bureaucracy if you believe that by merely speculating about it, a theoretician will arrive at a plan that will eliminate the possibility of bureaucratization. The only guarantee against bureaucratization lies in your own thought and action—in your greatest possible participation and certainly not in your abstention.”

We have said for some years in this journal that revolutionary activity is caught in a crucial contradiction: It participates in the society it is trying to abolish. This is the same sort of contradictory position the proletariat itself is in under capitalism. It is nonsensical to look *now* for a *theoretical* solution to this contradiction. No such solution exists, for a theoretical solution to a real contradiction is an absurdity. This does not warrant abstention but rather struggle. The contradiction resolves itself partially at each stage of action, but only revolution can resolve it totally. It is partially resolved in practice when a revolutionary puts before workers ideas that allow them to organize and clarify their experience—and, when these workers use these ideas to go further, to give rise to new, positive contents of the struggle, and eventually to “educate the educator.” It is resolved in part when an organization proposes a form of struggle and this form is taken up, enriched, and broadened by the workers. It is resolved when genuine collective work becomes instaurated within the organization; when each person’s ideas and experiences are discussed by the others, and then surpassed, to be merged in a common aim and action; and when militants develop themselves through their participation in every aspect of the life and activity of the organization.

None of this is ever gained once and for all, but it is only along these lines that progress can be made. Whatever the form of the organization and its activity, ef-

fective participation by militants will *always* be a problem, an achievement that must be reconsolidated daily. The problem will not be solved by decreeing that there will be no organization—which comes down to accepting a role of no participation whatsoever, i.e., the exact equivalent of the complete bureaucratic solution. Nor can it be solved by constitutional rules or bylaws that would automatically guarantee maximum participation—for no such rules exist. There are simply rules that *allow* for participation and others that *make it impossible*. Whatever the contents of the organization's revolutionary theory or program, however deep their connections with the experience and needs of the proletariat, there will always be the possibility, the *certainty* even, that at some point this theory and program will be outstripped by history, and there will always be the risk that those who have defended them up to that point will tend to make them into absolutes and try to subordinate and adapt the creations of living history to fit them. We can limit this risk and educate militants and, as a start, ourselves by the thought that the ultimate criterion of socialism lies in the people who struggle today and not in the resolutions voted on last year. But it can never be eliminated completely, and in any case it cannot be eliminated by eradicating theory and program, for this comes down to eliminating all rational action and to abandoning life in order to preserve bad reasons for living.

This contradictory situation has not been created by the revolutionary militant. It is imposed on him, as it is imposed on the proletariat, by capitalist society. What distinguishes the revolutionary militant from the bourgeois philosopher is that the former does not remain spellbound by the contradiction once he has become aware of it, but struggles to overcome it, not through solitary reflection or speculation, but through collective action. And to act is, in the first place, to get oneself organized.<sup>a</sup>

### Notes

1. The analysis of this question has occupied a central place in the work of *S. ou B.* We can only summarize our conclusions here. See *SB, RPR, CS I*, etc.

2. Attempts have been made for a long time to reduce the factors that brought about the degeneration of the Russian revolution to the international isolation of the revolution and to the backward state of Russia. This "explanation" explains nothing: International isolation and the backwardness of the country could just as well have led (purely and simply) to the defeat of the revolution and to the restoration of capitalism. Such considerations do not in any way explain how the revolution both "succeeded" and degenerated at the same time. To place the emphasis on these factors is both to conceal the particular historical nature of developments in Russia and to ignore its most fruitful lessons for revolutionary practice. Isolation and backwardness favored this development and gave it its concrete form. But they did not determine its real signification. One cannot make the process of bureaucratization into an accident; likewise, there is no basis for the claim that a widespread revolution in Germany, for example, "could not have degenerated." What developed out of the Russian Revolution has clearly shown that the problem of bureaucracy is one the whole of the international working class has to face and, moreover, that it cannot be solved except in terms of a real experience of the bureaucracy as a social reality.

3. See *S. ou B.*, 20 (December 1956), which is devoted almost entirely to the Hungarian Revolution, and the texts written by Hungarian revolutionaries, published in nos. 21 and 23 (January and July 1958).

4. This confusion constitutes the main basis for James Burnham's pseudoanalyses of the bureaucracy. See the first chapters of *The Managerial Revolution*.



5. Actual wage levels are determined in the majority of cases much less by official wage rates, collective bargaining, and trade-union agreements, and much more by what happens inside the production process; the regulation of piece rates, the division of workers' time between different types of work, and especially work norms play a decisive role on this score, and all these factors are the object of a fierce and permanent struggle between workers and management.

6. Bourgeois industrial sociologists like Elton Mayo have long realized this. Most of the time, present-day "Marxists" are fanatical defenders of hierarchy. However little one understands the condition of the modern firm, one can immediately see the stupidity of any kind of "socialism" that limits itself to making changes outside the firm and does not start by completely overthrowing the day-to-day system of production.

7. Advance or regression is not measured solely by the relative militancy of the working class, but also through its attitude toward problems it comes up against that cannot be reduced to political problems. The French "Left" takes delight in thinking the French working class is more "advanced" than the American or British working class because a majority of French workers support an organization like the CP whereas in England or the United States the workers vote for reformist or bourgeois parties. They have never given any attention to the fact that these American and English workers, whom they consider to be so politically "backward," are much more militant and unyielding in disputes at the point of production than the French workers; they don't even understand what these words mean.

8. Obviously it has other aspects too, for on the one hand it also expresses the self-perpetuating interests of the whole system of exploitation in general. And on the other hand, it must allow the bureaucratic organizations to maintain some hold over the working class, for without this hold they would be nothing. But these aspects are secondary in relation to the problem being discussed in the text.

9. These are Kautsky's formulations, which Lenin endorsed in *What Is to Be Done?* as "profoundly true and significant."

10. That the reformists used the idea of a scientific prediction of the evolution of the capitalist economy to condemn the idea of revolution and to "prove" that we should rely on the workings of economic laws to achieve socialism, changes nothing.

11. The expression is Kautsky's and appears in his introduction to *Capital* that, published separately under the title "General Introduction to Marxism," served as theoretical fodder for whole generations of militants.

12. Nowhere does the contradiction appear more clearly than in Rosa Luxemburg, the revolutionary who underlined most emphatically the importance of the masses' own experience and autonomous action and yet who devoted a major theoretical work to an attempt—a vain attempt, it must be said—to show that the process of accumulation would lead inevitably to the downfall of capitalism.

13. It is hardly necessary to repeat that this process has been a contradictory one, or rather that the reality of these organizations has been contradictory from the very beginning and for most of their history. If these organizations—the trade-unions and parties of the Second and Third Internationals—had been "just" bureaucracies, they would have been nothing at all, and could not have achieved what they achieved or have played the role that they played. Before they degenerate completely, there is in the practice of these organizations the equivalent of what has been said above about Marxist theory itself: a double reality. It can be seen again in the example—which is historically without doubt the most important of all—of Lenin's positions on the relationship between the Party and the masses. The idea of the Party as the custodian of socialist consciousness and of the proletariat as being incapable on its own of achieving anything more than trade-unionist consciousness, plays a rather episodic role in *What Is to Be Done?* and Trotsky assures us in his *Stalin* that Lenin would have abandoned it eventually. Yet it is taken up again with vigor in *An Infantile Disorder* (1920), where Lenin opposes the leftists with ideas on the relationship between the Party and the masses that are equivalent to those of *What Is to Be Done?* But in the meantime he had written *State and Revolution* (1917), in which the Party is completely absent. These contradictions can be found even more sharply drawn in Lenin's line of action, sometimes putting all the emphasis on building the Party, and, after 1917, trying to solve every problem by means of it, sometimes being inspired by what was most original and most profound in what the movement of the masses was creating, ap-

pealing to them against the Party, and, in the last years, observing with anxiety the gap that was appearing between them and it. On this, it should be pointed out for the benefit of certain professional critics of bolshevism that the bureaucratic side of Leninism existed just as much—though in a more hypocritical way—among the Social Democrats; these critics never speak of the bureaucratic side of social democracy, and one would search there in vain for the equivalent of its revolutionary side.

14. As Lenin did as regards reformist bureaucracy, and Trotsky, as regards Stalinist bureaucracy, whose bases, they believed, would be destroyed by the “objective crisis” of capitalism. This kind of argument boils down in the end to the idea of the “inevitable downfall” of capitalism.

15. T/E: Guy Mollet (1905-75) and Maurice Thorez (1900-64) were the secretaries-general of the SFIO and the PCF, respectively, at this time.

16. See issues 13 and 20 (January 1954 and December 1956) of this review and the texts reprinted in *SB 2*.

17. See the texts on the French strikes of 1953 and 1955 and on the strikes in England and the United States in nos. 13, 18, 19, and 26 (January 1954, January and July 1956, and November 1958) of *S. ou B.* (reprinted in *EMO 1* [T/E: some of which have been translated and appear in the present volume]). On the meaning of the French population’s attitude toward Gaullism, see the text entitled “Bilan” [T/E: not included in the present series; reprinted in *EMO 2*, pp. 89-116].

18. T/E: *Bougnoule* is a racially derogatory term applied especially to people of North African descent.

19. Whatever the severity of the crisis—the events in Poland have demonstrated this again recently—an exploitative society can only be overthrown if the masses are not merely stirred into action but raise this action up to the level needed for a new social organization to take the place of the old one. If this does not happen, social life will continue and it will continue following the old model, though perhaps superficially changed to a greater or lesser degree. Now, no theory can “prove” that the masses will inevitably reach this requisite level of activity; such a “proof” would be a contradiction in terms.

20. See *CS II*.

a) This text and the following one [T/E: i.e., *PO II*, which is not included in the present edition] were written during the summer of 1958 and circulated within the *S. ou B.* group in the autumn of the same year. The references to Claude Lefort’s text, around which the comrades who left the group were united, are given later. I do not have anything of great import to add to the description of circumstances surrounding this scission furnished in the following text, for otherwise I would have to go into detail about the history of the group from its beginnings, a task that does not strike me as particularly urgent today. On the antecedents to this whole discussion, see also “Postface to *The Revolutionary Party and Proletarian Leadership*,” *EMO 1*, pp. 163-78. [T/E: see volume 1 of the present edition for excerpts from this postface.]

As for problems of a substantial nature, I still support the ideas formulated in the preceding text although I now consider them inadequate and incomplete. I do not think that it would be very useful to add many comments to this discussion of the year 1958, for it could only be enriched by going beyond the very terrain on which it took place. This terrain was very narrow indeed, almost exclusively sociological, rational, and operative. Questions such as “*who* agitates,” “*why*,” and “*how*” were barely broached at all, by either side; neither were the questions raised that do in fact arise at the level of *groups* of militants (such groups are far from constituting rational and transparent working collectives). These psychic and “psychological” factors, however, determine the actual functioning and the reality of such groups and organizations as much as general sociological factors, and much more than their “programs” and “bylaws.”

One can find a brief—and partially inaccurate—description of the 1958 scission (as well as an exposition of a point of view opposed to that formulated in *PO*) in the pamphlet Henri Simon published after his break with Informations et Correspondance Ouvrières. Simon had helped found *ICO* after his departure from *S. ou B.* and his separation from Claude Lefort. The pamphlet is entitled, *I.C.O.: Un point de vue*, and it is available through the author, 34 rue St.-Sébastien, Paris 75011. [T/E: Photocopies can still be obtained from him at this address.] One should not be surprised if I say that the conclusion I have drawn after reading it is that the evolution of *ICO* and Simon’s final break with it were determined in large part by the presence of problems whose existence and importance he refused to recognize in 1958.

## What Really Matters

In issue number 3 of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, a schoolteacher posed the following question: Why don't workers write? He showed in a profound way how this is due to their total situation in society and also to the nature of the so-called education dispensed by schools in capitalist society. He also mentioned that workers often think their experience "isn't interesting."

This last point seems to me absolutely fundamental, and I would like to share my experience on it, which is not that of a worker, but of a militant.

When workers ask an intellectual to talk to them about the problems of capitalism and socialism, they find it hard to understand that we accord a central place to the workers' situation in the factory and at the point of production. I often have had occasion to present to workers some of my ideas, expressed in the following way:

- The way in which the capitalist factory is organized creates a perpetual conflict between workers and management on the very issue of how production is to be carried out.
- Management is always cooking up new ways of chaining workers down to "the discipline of producing" as this is understood by management.
- Workers are always inventing new ways of defending themselves.
- This struggle often has more influence over real wage levels than do negotiations or even strikes.

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Originally published as "Ce qui est important," *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, 5 (March 1959), the monthly supplement to *S. ou B.* Reprinted in *EMO* 2, pp. 249-53. [T/E: *Pouvoir Ouvrier* means "Workers' power." We have consulted Tom McLaughlin's translation of this article, which appeared in *Catalyst*, 13 (Spring 1979), pp. 91-94, as "What Is Important." McLaughlin's translation also was published in *The Red Menace*, 3 (Winter 1979). Our change in title is at Castoriadis's suggestion; he had originally sought a French equivalent of this English phrase.]

- The resulting wastefulness is tremendous and far greater than the wastefulness brought on by economic crises.
- Trade unions always are out of touch with and most often are even hostile to this kind of working-class struggle.
- Militants who are workers ought to spread the word of all examples of this struggle that can be used outside the specific company in which they originally were produced.
- This situation would not be changed in the least by the mere “nationalization” of the factories and the application of “planning” to the economy.
- Consequently, socialism is inconceivable without a complete change in the way production is organized in factories, and without the suppression of the present management and the instauration of workers’ management.

These statements were both concrete and theoretical. In each instance they provided real and precise examples. At the same time, however, these statements, far from being limited to the mere description of facts, were an attempt to draw overall conclusions. Here we have things about which workers obviously had the most direct and complete experience. And yet, on the other hand, they had a profound and universal meaning.

Nevertheless, what we discovered was that our listeners had little to say and appeared rather disappointed. They had come to talk or to listen to people talk about things that *really mattered*, and it was hard for them to believe that the things they themselves do every day really mattered. They thought someone was going to talk to them about absolute or relative surplus value, about the falling rate of profit, about overproduction and underconsumption. It seemed unbelievable to them that the evolution of modern society is determined far more by the daily movements and gestures of millions of workers in factories all over the world than by some great and mysterious hidden laws of the economy discovered by theoreticians. They even wrangled over whether such a permanent struggle between workers and management existed and whether the workers actually were defending themselves. Once the discussion really got rolling, however, what they said showed that they themselves were conducting this struggle from the moment they set foot in the factory until the time they left.

This idea workers have that how they live, what they do, and what they think “doesn’t really matter” is not only the thing that prevents them from expressing themselves. *It is the gravest manifestation of the ideological enslavement brought on by capitalism.* For capitalism can survive only if people are persuaded that what they themselves do and know is a private little matter of their own that does not really matter, and that really important matters are the monopoly of the big shots and specialists in various fields of endeavor. Capitalism is constantly trying to drum this idea into people’s heads.

But we also must point out that it has been powerfully helped along in this work by the workers’ own labor organizations. For quite a long time, trade unions and working-class parties have tried to persuade workers that the *only* questions that really mattered concerned either wages in particular or the economy, politics, and society in general. This is already wrong. But there is some-

thing even worse. What these organizations considered as “theory” on these questions and what more and more has passed for such in the public’s eyes, instead of being, as it should have been, closely connected to the experience of workers at the point of production and in their social life, has become an allegedly “scientific” theory that is also becoming more and more abstract (and more and more false). Of course, only specialists—i.e., intellectuals and leaders—know about this theory and can talk about it. The workers are just supposed to keep quiet and try conscientiously to absorb and assimilate the “truths” these “experts” spout at them.

Thus we get a twofold result. The intense desire large sections of the working class have to enlarge their knowledge and expand their horizons so that they might be able to go beyond the confines of their particular factory and form an idea of society at large that would aid them in their struggle is destroyed right from the very start. The so-called theory put in front of them appears, in the best of cases, as a sort of impenetrable higher algebra or, as is the case today, a string of incomprehensible words that don’t explain a thing. On the other hand, workers have no way of checking on the content of this “theory” or its truth value; the proofs are to be found, they are told, in the hundred-plus chapters of *Capital* and in huge, mysterious books owned by wiser comrades—in whom they will just have to place their confidence.

The roots and the consequences of this situation are far-ranging indeed. At its origin we discover a deep-seated, bourgeois way of looking at things: Just as there are laws of physics, there supposedly are economic and social laws, and these laws have nothing to do with people’s direct experience. There are social scientists and social engineers who know them. Just as only the engineer can tell you how to build a bridge, so these social engineers—political and trade-union leaders—alone can tell you how to organize society. To change society is to change the overall way in which it is organized, but this does not have any effect at all upon what goes on in the factories—since that “doesn’t really matter.”

To get beyond this situation, it won’t do to just tell the workers: Speak up, it’s up to you to say what the problems are. What remains to be done is to tear down this monstrously wrong-headed idea that these problems as they are seen by workers don’t really matter, that other problems are far more important and that only “theoreticians” and politicians can talk about them. One cannot understand anything about the factory if one does not understand society at large, but nothing can be understood about society at large if the factory is not understood. There is only one way to do this: The workers must speak.

To show this ought to be the primary and permanent task of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*.

# Modern Capitalism and Revolution

## [MCR I]

### [Synopsis]

The length of this text and the need to spread its publication over several issues of this review prompt us, by way of an introduction, to provide a summary of its main theses.

In marked contrast to the activity of the masses in backward countries, a prolonged political apathy on the part of the working class seems to be characteristic of modern capitalist societies. In France even, Gaullism—which represents capitalism’s effort to modernize itself—was possible only on the basis of such apathy. In its turn, it has reinforced this tendency. Since Marxism is above all a theory of the proletarian revolution in advanced countries, one cannot continue to call oneself Marxist and remain silent on these problems. What does the “modernization” of capitalism consist of? What is its connection with the polit-

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Originally published as “Le Mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne,” *S. ou B.*, 31-33 (December 1960, April and December, 1961). The first version of this text was published in the *Bulletin Intérieur*, no. 12 of the Socialisme ou Barbarie group (October 1959); the second in no. 17 (May 1960). On the controversy which it has generated since the outset, the attempts to prevent or delay its publication and finally the 1963 scission, see “Postface à *Recommencer la révolution*,” in *EMO* 2, pp. 373ff. [T/E: Translation to be included in the projected third volume of the present edition.] The first installment of the text (*S. ou B.*, no. 31) was preceded by the following notice: “The text presented here, whose ideas are not necessarily shared by the entire Socialisme ou Barbarie group, opens up a discussion on the problems of revolutionary politics in the present era which will be continued in the coming issues of this review.” This article was reprinted in *CMR* 2, pp. 47-203. [T/E: It was first translated into English by Maurice Brinton as *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* (London: Solidarity, 1963 and 1965; 2nd ed., 1974). Both editions designate the author as “Paul Cardan.” The present translation has made extensive use of Brinton’s version. Section titles from

ical apathy of the masses? What are the consequences of all this for the revolutionary movement today?

First, we ought to look into and describe some of the new and enduring traits of capitalism. The ruling classes have successfully gotten a handle on the level of economic activity and have been able to prevent major economic crises. In numerical terms, unemployment has decreased to a great extent. The working class's real wages are going up much more rapidly and regularly than before. These steadier wage increases have brought in their wake an increase in mass consumption that in fact has become indispensable to the continuing operation of the economy and that is now irreversible. Trade unions, having become mere cogs in the system, negotiate the workers' docility in return for higher wages. Political life takes place exclusively among specialists. The general population has lost all interest in such matters. There are no more political organizations in which the working class participates or to which it lends its support through its actions. Outside of the sphere of production the proletariat no longer appears to be a class with its own goals and objectives. The entire population is caught up in a vast movement of *privatization*; everyone takes care of his own business, but the affairs of society as a whole seem to escape their control.

If they strictly followed their own principles, prisoners of traditional ways of looking at things would have to conclude that there no longer is a revolutionary perspective on events or any prospects for revolution. Indeed, for traditional Marxism, the "objective" contradictions of capitalism were essentially economic ones, and the system's radical inability to satisfy the working class's *economic* demands made these the motive force of the class struggle.

Although this view corresponded to certain outward manifestations of capitalism during its previous stages, these ideas fall apart in the face of present-day experience. "Objective" economic contradictions disappear when capital becomes totally concentrated (as is the case in Eastern bloc countries). And the degree of State intervention found today in the West suffices to smooth out the economy's spontaneously generated imbalances. Wage levels are determined not by "objective" economic laws but basically by class struggle; provided they do not exceed productivity increases, wage increases are quite feasible under capitalism today.

The traditional view also is false on the philosophical level. Objectivist and mechanistic, it eliminates the actions of people and classes from history to re-

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the English edition are placed in brackets. Following his practice, Castoriadis's additions to the 1963 and 1965 English editions and the 1979 French edition are placed in brackets, preceded by the corresponding year. These additions, when written by the author in English, are printed verbatim, except for alterations in quotations, the "Americanization" of spellings and phrases, and minor editorial changes and corrections.]

The Appendix was written at the request of the English comrades of Solidarity to accompany the English translation of *MRCM* (published in April 1965). I translated the Appendix into French, with a few slight modifications intended to aid in the understanding of the text. Reprinted in *CMR* 2, pp. 205-22. The "Author's Introduction to the 1974 English Edition" was written in English for Solidarity's 1974 reprint edition of *MCR*; I translated it into French for inclusion in *CMR* 2, pp. 223-58. [T/E: The present version adopts the slight changes introduced in the 1979 French text, "Americanizes" the English text, and makes a number of minor editorial changes and corrections.]

place these actions with an “objective dynamic” and “natural laws.” It makes of the proletarian revolution a simple reflex of revolt against hunger, and it provides no clear reason why a socialist society might be the result. But there is even more. The understanding of the capitalist economy and its crisis becomes for the traditional view the prerogative of specialized theoreticians. The solution to this crisis becomes a simple question of making some “objective” transformations in its structure, i.e., the elimination of private property and the market; in no way is an autonomous intervention on the part of the proletariat required. This view can only serve, and has only served in history, as the foundation for a *bureaucratic* politics.

The fundamental contradiction of capitalism is to be found in *production* and *work*. This contradiction is contained within the *alienation* experienced by every worker. We may summarize this alienation by pointing out capitalism’s need to reduce workers to the role of mere executants and the inability of this system to function if it succeeded in achieving this required objective. In other words, capitalism needs to realize simultaneously the participation and exclusion of the workers in the production process. The same goes for citizens in the political sphere, and so on and so forth.

As the only real contradiction in contemporary society and also the ultimate source of its crisis, this alienation cannot be alleviated by carrying out reforms, by raising the standard of living, or by eliminating private property and the “market.” It will be abolished only by the instauration of the workers’ collective management over both production and society as a whole. Experienced daily by the proletariat, this alienation is the only possible basis for the proletariat to achieve socialist consciousness and it is what gives the class struggle under capitalism its universal and permanent character. It establishes the framework for the history and the dynamics of capitalist society, which is nothing other than the history and dynamics of this class struggle. This dynamic is *historical* rather than “objective,” for it constantly modifies both the conditions under which it develops as well as the very adversaries who are parties to this conflict. As such it gives rise to collective *experience* and collective *creation*. To an increasing degree, the class struggle has determined the way technology, production, politics, and the economy have evolved. Directly or indirectly, it has forced upon capitalism the changes we are describing here today.

At the “subjective” level, these changes are expressed in the accumulated *experience* the ruling classes have of the class struggle, and in the *new capitalist policies* they accordingly adopt. For Marxists, capitalist policy used to be synonymous with impotence, pure and simple. Such a policy was dominated by the ideology of “laissez-faire,” which limited the role of the State to that of a policeman. Today, however, this policy recognizes the State’s overall responsibilities and constantly is seeking to enlarge its functions. It now is taking on certain objectives (such as full employment and economic development) that no longer can be left to the “spontaneous” functioning of the economic system. Today this policy is tending to put all spheres of social activity under its control. Whatever its form, it thereby adopts a *totalitarian* character.

At the “objective” level, the transformations of capitalism are expressed in



increasing “bureaucratization.” The origins of this tendency are in production, but eventually it extends itself to the economy as a whole and to politics. Ultimately, it invades all sectors of social life. Bureaucratization obviously goes hand in hand with the expanded role and increasing preponderance of the bureaucracy as a managerial stratum. Concentration and statification are but different aspects of the same phenomenon. And in their turn, they significantly modify the functioning of the economy as a whole.

But the most profound effect of bureaucratization is that, as an “organization” and “rationalization” of all collective activity from the outside, it carries out a *destruction of the significations* first created by capitalism as it produces *mass irresponsibility*. Privatization on the individual level is a corollary of these phenomena.

The “ideal tendency” of bureaucratic capitalism is the constitution of a totally hierarchized society in continuous expansion where people’s increasing alienation in their work would be compensated by a “rising standard of living” and where all initiative would be given over to “organizers.” Objectively inscribed within contemporary social reality, this tendency coincides with the ultimate goal of the ruling classes: to foil the revolt of the exploited by harnessing them to the race for an improved standard of living, by breaking up their solidarity through hierarchization and by bureaucratizing all collective efforts. Conscious or not, this is the *bureaucratic capitalist project*, the practical meaning that ties together the actions undertaken by the ruling classes with the objective processes unfolding in their society.

This project fails because it cannot overcome capitalism’s basic contradiction, which, on the contrary, it is magnifying to infinity. Increasing bureaucratization of social activities extends into every domain the basic conflict between directors and executants and the irrationality that is inherent in management by bureaucracies. For this reason, capitalism absolutely cannot avoid *crises* (breakdowns in the normal functioning of society), although these crises are not always of the same type, nor do they stem from a *single*, uniform set of causes. Upon the basis of the same immanent capitalist contradiction, the old expressions of capitalist irrationality are replaced by new ones.

Only the class struggle can give the contradictions and crises of modern society a revolutionary character. The present situation is ambiguous in this respect. *In production*, this struggle appears with a hitherto unknown intensity. It tends to raise the question of who will manage production, and this in the most modern countries. *Outside of production*, however, it no longer expresses itself at all, or only in a truncated and distorted way, through bureaucratized organizations.

The proletariat’s “absence from society” also has a double meaning. On the one hand, it represents a victory for capitalism. The bureaucratization of their organizations drives the workers away from collective action. The collapse of traditional ideology and the absence of a socialist program prevent them from generalizing their criticism of the production process and from transforming this criticism into a positive conception of a new society. The philosophy of consumption itself begins to penetrate into the proletariat. But on the other hand, the proletariat is experiencing a new phase in the history of capitalism that could

lead to a far more profound and general critique of capitalist ways of living than was ever possible in the past. And this could lead to a renewal within the proletariat of the socialist project at a higher level than ever before.

The “ripening” of the conditions for socialism continues. Of course, this can never mean a purely objective ripening (growth of the forces of production or growing “contradictions”). Nor can it ever mean a purely subjective experience (the sedimentation of actual experience in proletarians). It means rather the *accumulation of the objective conditions for an adequate consciousness*.<sup>a</sup> The proletariat cannot eliminate reformism or bureaucratism before it has lived through them, that is to say, before it has produced them as living social realities. *Today*, workers’ management and the overcoming of the capitalist values of production and consumption as ends in themselves appear to the proletariat as the only way out.

These conditions require that the revolutionary movement undergo profound transformations. Its critique of society, which is essential for helping the workers see that their own direct experience is valuable and can be generalized, has to be completely reoriented. It should seek to describe and analyze the contradictions and the irrationality of the bureaucratic management of society at every level and to denounce the inhuman and absurd character of *work* today. It should expose the arbitrariness and monstrosity of hierarchy in both production and in society at large. In a corresponding fashion, its program of demands should center around the struggle over the way work is organized and over labor and living conditions in the workplace as well as the struggle against hierarchy. On the other hand, the basic problem the revolutionary movement faces in the age of modern capitalism is how to pass from class struggle on the level of the enterprise to the class struggle on the overall level of society. The movement can fulfill its role in this respect only if it destroys all the equivocations and double-talk now weighing down on the idea of socialism, only if it ruthlessly denounces the values of contemporary society, and only if it presents the socialist program to the proletariat for what it really is: a program for humanizing work and society.

The revolutionary movement will be able to fulfill these tasks only if it ceases to appear as a traditional revolutionary movement—traditional politics are dead—and becomes a total movement concerned with everything people do in society and above all with their real daily lives. Likewise, it therefore should cease being an organization of specialists and become instead a place for positive socialization where individuals relearn how to live a truly collective life by managing their own affairs and by developing themselves through their work in a common endeavor [*projet*].

Finally, it is obvious that the theoretical conceptions underlying revolutionary activity—and the very conception of what revolutionary theory is—will have to be changed radically.<sup>b</sup>

*[The Problem Stated]*

*There are people who succeed in being revolutionaries only by keeping their eyes shut.*

—Leon Trotsky<sup>1</sup>

In Cuba, a partisan peasant force has overthrown a long-established dictatorship that had been supported by the United States. In South Africa, illiterate blacks subjected for generations to the totalitarian domination of three million white slave masters have formed clandestine organizations, mobilized themselves collectively, invented unprecedented forms of struggle, and are on the point of forcing the Verwoerd government to commence what the *Financial Times* called "a long and painful retreat." In South Korea, the dictatorship of Syngman Rhee, supported openly by the United States for the past fifteen years, has collapsed under the blows dealt by popular demonstrations in which students have played a preponderant role. Again, it was students who were the first to line up in Turkey against the Menderes government and its dictatorial measures; they opened up the crisis that ended in the fall of the regime.

In France, however, a regime collapsed in 1958 and a war has been going on for six years amid general apathy. In the United States, politicians and sociologists bemoan the political indifference of the population.<sup>2</sup> In England, after a series of electoral defeats, the Labour party cannot even succeed in getting its own members interested in a discussion of how to change its program. Political life in the Federal Republic of Germany is basically reduced to the whims of an eighty-year-old man and to intrigues being hatched around who will be his successor.

Must we conclude that from now on mass political activity is a phenomenon confined to backward countries, that the only groups capable of acting to change their destiny are peasants, students, and oppressed races in colonial countries? Is the population's interest in politics a direct function of economic and cultural "backwardness," and does modern civilization signify that the fate of society no longer concerns its members?

What has been happening in France for the past two years obliges us to pose these very questions even more concretely. After having reflected upon the instauration and the present course of the Fifth Republic, we must make two conclusions. First of all, whatever the intentions and ideas of its top rulers, the contradictions that tear at it, and the impasses it encounters, the objective meaning of the Gaullist regime is that French capitalism is undergoing a process of modernization. The net effect of this effort might be difficult to calculate,<sup>3</sup> but its meaning is as clear-cut as the irreversible character of its effects upon French social realities is far-reaching. Second, this effort was possible from the beginning and remains so today only in terms of the overall attitude of the population, and of the laboring masses in particular. This attitude boils down to their apathy or indifference to political matters, which, as a first approximation, we can call their depoliticization.<sup>4</sup>

If these two conclusions sum up the meaning of the present situation in France, it is clear that they also raise at the same time a series of problems. Indeed, one cannot in all seriousness define the present evolution of French society as some kind of "modernization" without reflecting on the content of this modernization effort and without having a deeper understanding of its meaning. One cannot limit oneself to the conclusion that it is the apathy of the masses that has allowed Gaullism (as a modernization effort) to succeed and then refuse to question oneself on the connection between these two phenomena. Last and cer-

tainly not least, one cannot talk about depoliticization while omitting to mention that this depoliticization appears as characteristic of *all* modern countries for the past fifteen years and that France has caught up with more advanced countries only rather late in the game.

Indeed, we must insist on the *general* character of this phenomenon. The countries concerned—and the ones to which we will refer in this text when we speak of modern capitalist countries—are all those in which precapitalist structures in the economy and in the overall organization of society basically have been eliminated. These are the only countries that count when we want to talk about the problems of a *capitalist* society rather than the problems associated with the *passage* from *another* form of social life to capitalism. These countries include the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, England, West Germany, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, now France and soon Italy. In all, the populations of these countries exceed 450 million inhabitants. In them are concentrated three-quarters of total production in the Western world and nine-tenths of its industrial production. Last and certainly not least, these countries are where the overwhelming majority of the *modern proletariat* lives and works. And, among the countries of the Eastern bloc, the ones that have gone through the process of industrialization—like Russia, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany—basically are heading down the same, or a fundamentally similar, road.

Now of course, the great majority of humanity still remains outside this type of system of rule. This applies to the overwhelming majority of people from countries in the Western world (1.4 billion inhabitants versus 450 million) as well as from the Eastern bloc (650 million versus 250).<sup>c</sup> But it is—or it should be—just as obvious that Marxism is in the first place a theory of revolution in capitalist countries, not in backward countries. If Marxists search for the roots of revolution from now on in colonial countries, and the contradictions of capitalism in the opposition between the West and the Third World or even in the struggle between the two blocs, they might just as well stop calling themselves Marxists. For Marxism was or tried to be a theory of socialist revolution supported by the proletariat, not a theory of the revolution of African peasants or of Apulian farmhands in southern Italy. It was not a theory of revolution produced by noncapitalist remnants still extant in the societies of various nations or of the world in general. It was rather the ideological expression of the proletariat's activity, itself the product of capitalism and industrialization. However important backward countries may be, it is not in Léopoldville, or even in Peking, but in Pittsburgh and Detroit, in the Midlands and in the Ruhr valley, in the industrial belt around Paris, in Moscow and in Stalingrad that the fate of the modern world ultimately will be decided. And no one can call himself a Marxist or revolutionary socialist if he evades the following question: What is becoming of the proletariat today as a revolutionary class where the proletariat *actually* exists?

We are therefore going to try to understand in what the “modernization” of capitalism consists. In other words, what are the changes that have supervened in the workings of capitalism that distinguish contemporary capitalism from either the capitalism of previous eras or—and this is almost as important—from

the image the traditional Marxist movement has made of it. What is the connection between the “modernization” of capitalism and the “depoliticization” of the masses. Finally, what can revolutionary politics in the present era be and what should it be?<sup>5</sup>

### *I. A Few Important Traits of Contemporary Capitalism*

To start with, we will limit ourselves to *describing* new phenomena (either actually new or new in relation to traditional Marxist theory). At this point we are not trying to provide an analysis of these phenomena and still less a systematic explanation of them.<sup>6</sup>

1. Capitalism has succeeded in getting a handle on the level of economic activity to such a degree that fluctuations in production and demand are kept within narrow limits, and depressions on the scale of prewar days now have been ruled out. This is the result both of changes in the economy itself and of new relations between the State and the economy.

*First of all*, the range of spontaneous fluctuations in economic activity has been considerably reduced because the components of overall social demand have become much more stable. This stability, in its turn, is the result of many factors.

a) Rising wage rates, an increase in the number of workers on permanent hire, and the introduction of unemployment insurance have limited variations in the demand for consumer goods—and hence in the production of these goods. They also have greatly lessened the cumulative effect that downward trends in demand once used to have.

b) The continuous and irreversible increase in state expenditures creates a stable demand that absorbs 20 to 25 percent of the social product. Taking into account the activities of semigovernmental institutions and funds that “pass through” the state, the public sector controls or handles up to 40 or 45 percent of the total social product in the case of certain countries.

[1965: For instance, in Britain in 1961, the gross national expenditure (or “gross national product at market prices”) amounted to £26.986 billion. The total revenue of the Combined Public Authorities (i.e., direct and indirect taxes, contributions paid to the central government or to local authorities, etc.) amounted to £8.954 billion—or 33.3 percent of the gross national product (Tables 1 and 43 in *National Income and Expenditure, 1963*, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, London).

On the other hand, out of a total domestic investment of fixed capital of £4.577 billion in 1961, £1.799 billion—about 40 percent—was invested by State and public enterprises (Tables 1 and 48, *National Income*).

Taking the two amounts together—and eliminating some duplications—it can be seen that the proportion of gross national product *directly* handled by the State in 1961 was just under 40 percent.

In 1963, in Britain, the State and its agencies (including the boards of the nationalized industries and local authorities) employed 5,250,000 people (excluding the armed forces). This accounts for nearly 25 percent of all employed per-

sons and contrasts with figures of less than 2,000,000 (about 10 percent) in 1939.]

c) Capitalist accumulation, whose fluctuations were principally responsible for economic instability in the past, varies much less than it used to, first, because capital tends to be invested now in much more massive amounts, and these investments tend to be spread over a longer period of time; because the accelerated rate of technical progress induces or obliges business enterprises to invest in a much more continuous fashion; and finally, because, in the view of capitalists, continued expansion justifies an investment policy of constant growth. In their turn, these investments nourish further expansion and ratify the whole policy, so to speak, after the fact.

*Second*, the State has a continuous policy of conscious intervention aimed at maintaining economic expansion. Even if the capitalist State's policy is incapable of avoiding alternating phases of recession and inflation in the economy, still less of assuring its optimum rational development, it has been obliged to assume the responsibility for maintaining relative "full employment" and for eliminating major depressions. The situation in 1933, which would correspond today in the United States to there being thirty million unemployed, is absolutely inconceivable, for it would provoke a total explosion of the system within twenty-four hours. Neither the workers nor the capitalists would tolerate it any longer. The extent of its intervention in economic life and especially the enormous share of the social product it directly or indirectly handles now furnish the capitalist State with the instruments it needs to confine economic fluctuations within narrow limits.

2. Consequently, despite pockets of unemployment, the numerical importance of unemployment (we are not speaking here of its human importance)<sup>7</sup> has diminished tremendously.

[1963: In practically all industrialized European countries, the percentage of unemployment has remained very low since the end of the war, fluctuating between 1 and 2 percent of the labor force. In Britain, where the swings have been largest, the average annual percentage of unemployed did not exceed 2.3 percent (in 1959). It reached between 3 and 4 percent in the first quarter of 1963, but by the end of the year it was running again around 2 percent. Western Germany absorbed a number of unemployed exceeding 1.5 million in 1950, and an influx of refugees of about 200,000 a year. Since 1960, unemployment in that country has remained below 1 percent. In France, unemployment has never exceeded 1 percent of the labor force. Italy and Japan—countries where industrialization was far from complete in the early postwar period—not only absorbed a huge number of agricultural workers into industry, but brought their unemployment down from 9.4 percent in 1955 to 3 percent in 1962 (in the case of Italy) and, in the case of Japan, to as low as 0.9 percent in 1962. In Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands the figure has never exceeded 2.6 percent since 1954 (and is currently much lower).

Even the United States, where the economic policies of the Eisenhower administration created virtual stagnation for eight years, and where the full impact of rapidly advancing automation is felt (see below) unemployment averaged 4.6

percent between 1946 and 1962, with a peak of 6.8 percent in 1958. This compares with prewar oscillations of the unemployment rate in the United States of between 3.3 percent (in the “boom” year of 1929) and 25 percent (in 1933). The unemployment rate was still 10 percent in 1940, a year of “full recovery” and war preparations. See *United Nations Statistical Yearbook, 1963* (Table 10, pp. 60-61).]

With a few local exceptions there has been little technological unemployment, despite enormous technical change. And it is clear that the introduction of automation will not create unemployment in this regard on anything more than the local level.<sup>8</sup>

3. The near disappearance of unemployment has contributed to a long-term rise in average earnings for the working class. But above all, increases in real wages have been not only more rapid than in previous periods of capitalism but much more regular.<sup>9</sup> This is, first and foremost, the result of more than a century of working-class struggles, both general, organized struggles as well as “informal” struggles within a firm or individual shop. In more general terms, it comes from the constant pressure exerted in this direction by wage earners in every country and at all times.

[1965: To quote but one instance: In Britain average hourly earnings of male adult workers in manufacturing rose from 39s. 6d. in 1950 to 84s. 9d. in 1964, a total increase of 114.3 percent—which is equivalent to a compound rate of growth of 6.6 percent per annum. (See *OECD General Statistics*, July 1964, p. 121.) In these calculations, “earnings” include bonuses, cost-of-living allowances, and taxes and contributions payable by the employed person. They represent the average *hourly* earnings, inclusive of overtime, calculated over a whole working week.

Of course a big part of this rise in wages was eroded by the rising cost of living. The consumer price index rose during the same period by 61.7 percent—or 4.1 percent per annum compound (*ibid.*). This gives the average annual growth of earnings *in real terms* at 2.5 percent (compound). This is rather lower than the corresponding rates for industrial continental countries.

Furthermore, we are not saying that the process is an even one. In Britain, in 1964, for instance, 10 percent of male adult workers still earned less than twelve pounds per week.]

On the other hand, employers have resorted to a new policy that is being applied by an increasing number of firms. This policy can be summarized as follows: Give in, when one has to, on wages, even anticipate demands in order to avoid conflicts, but make up for this by stepping up output and productivity; bring the unions around to this policy whenever possible; and try to “integrate” the workers into the firm by offering benefits and other setups expressly calculated to bring about this desired effect.

Economic demands in the narrow sense—those aiming at wage increases and even those aiming at a reduction in the workday—no longer appear, either in the workers’ eyes or in the eyes of the capitalists, as impossible to satisfy without upsetting the social system. An annual increase in [real] wages on the order of 3 percent is now considered natural, normal, and inevitable, both by the bosses

and by the workers (of course, the latter view this as the minimum, the former see it as the maximum). Capitalism can achieve a compromise on the issue of how to distribute the social product precisely because a rate of increase in wages on the same order as the increase in labor productivity leaves the existing method of allocation more or less intact.

[1965: If one looks at the distribution of the national product in the United Kingdom over the last quarter of a century, some interesting facts emerge. Excluding the pay of the armed forces, income from employment (wages, salaries, and employers' contributions to National Insurance, etc.) rose from £2.956 billion in 1938 to 7.375 billion in 1950, and to 16.673 in 1962 (*National Income and Expenditure, 1963*, Table 2, pp. 3-4). As the national income rose during the same period from £4.816 billion to 10.701 billion and to 22.631 billion respectively (Table 1, pp. 2-3), it will be seen that the proportion of the national income represented by "labor income" increased from 61.4 percent in 1939 to 68.9 percent in 1950 and 73.7 percent in 1962. This partly reflects the increase in the proportion, within the total labor force, of those dependently employed (i.e., the further shrinking of "self-employment" in agriculture, small trade, etc.). But there can be no doubt that the labor share *did not fall*. Labor's income has risen at least *pari passu* with the value of total output.

Similar trends can be observed in all industrialized countries. Although these (and any other) statistics need to be interpreted with care for numerous reasons, some of which are well known and some less well known, no restrictions or qualifications can reverse the basic conclusion: that wages rise in the long run *pari passu* with output. As will be explained later in the text *they are bound to*.]

4. Rising wage rates and the near disappearance of unemployment have led to a steady increase in the worker's standard of living, as measured in terms of goods consumed. In the long run, and leaving aside cyclical fluctuations and those due to local or particular occupational situations, this increase tends to run parallel with the overall rise in production.

[1965: This does not mean, of course, that modern capitalism has eliminated poverty. In Britain, for instance, in 1964 there were some three million people on National Assistance benefits, each one a living indictment of the system, and each one living proof of the incompleteness and unevenness of the changes we are describing. One should not forget, however, that both the concept and the definition of poverty should be looked at historically, that they have changed over a century, and that today the level below which one "qualifies" for "public aid" is certainly higher than it was prewar.

There has, moreover, been a genuine change in living standards. When Michael Harrington (in *The Other America*) or President Johnson speak of the "submerged fifth" of the American population, this is certainly a powerful indictment of the most modern capitalism in the world. Such poverty should certainly be brought to light and denounced. But for those who wish to look a little deeper, this "submerged fifth" should be seen against the background of President Truman's "underprivileged quarter of our people" and of President Roosevelt's "depressed third."] ]

This phenomenon is not just irreversible (barring a world cataclysm). It re-



sults from a process that nothing can stop any longer, for it is now incorporated into the anatomy, into the physical structure of capital. Two-thirds of end-use production today is made up of objects of consumption and a growing proportion of these products is being mass produced. Capital accumulation would be impossible in these sectors of the economy without steady growth of mass demand for consumer goods, including those formerly considered luxury items. This whole process is sustained by a tremendous amount of commercialization and by advertising campaigns aimed at creating new needs and at psychologically manipulating consumers. It is reinforced by collateral systems such as consumer credit, which have had decisive effects upon the “durable goods” market.<sup>10</sup> The rising standard of living goes hand in hand with an increase in leisure, though this is much more limited and irregular in its development. The two are accompanied by changes in consumption patterns as well as, up to a certain point, overall changes in people’s way of life.<sup>11</sup>

5. The role of trade unions has been profoundly altered, both objectively and in the eyes of both the capitalists and the workers. Their basic function has become the maintenance of labor peace in exchange for periodic wage concessions and a highly relative status quo on labor conditions. Capitalists thus see unions as a necessary evil that they have given up fighting, even indirectly. They are seen by workers as “corporate” organs, as a kind of mutual-benefit society capable, after a fashion, of guaranteeing some of their interests as workers and useful for obtaining timely wage increases. The idea that unions might have any relation whatsoever with a violent or peaceful, sudden or gradual transformation of the social system is, in the eyes of the workers and to judge from their actions, an idea that has come straight from Mars.<sup>12</sup>

6. Political life, in the current sense of the term, has become, in fact and in the eyes of the workers, a specialized business. It is generally considered a dishonest game played by “the same old bunch of crooks.”<sup>13</sup> The population has lost all interest, not only during normal periods of time, but even during those the specialists consider “periods of political crisis.” People never go any further than playing in the electoral game once every few years. They do so in a cynical and disillusioned way.

7. In particular, there are no more any *working-class* political organizations (we are not even saying revolutionary ones). What goes by this name are some political organizations made up nine-tenths of bureaucrats, a handful of sincere or career-hunting intellectuals and some professional trade unionists for whom the majority of the working class either votes or does not vote. In no modern country today does there exist any political organization of appreciable size whose militants come in any significant proportion from the working class or which is even capable of effectively mobilizing a significant proportion of this class on political issues (even if we take a figure as low as 10 or 15 percent). Obviously this change is connected with the degeneration and bureaucratization of the old working-class organizations, which have become basically indistinguishable from bourgeois political organizations. But it also corresponds to a change in capitalism as a whole, as we have described it here. We will come back to this point later.

8. At first sight, the proletariat in this society appears to have ceased to be a *class for itself* and has returned to being a *class in itself*. In other words, it has become merely a social category defined by the position its members occupy in the relations of production; this category is constituted by the objective identity of the situation in which its members find themselves in society, but these individuals do not consciously, explicitly, and collectively pose to themselves the problem of their fate within this society. To be more precise, the proletariat continues to appear as a class that is conscious of its collective being, and it acts as such when its “economic” or “occupational” interests are at stake. Moreover, the workers or wage earners in each factory are tending, to an increasing degree, to take the form of a collectivity and to act as such in the permanent struggle within the enterprise, when it comes to production relations and labor conditions. We will return to this phenomenon at greater length, for it is, for us, the fundamental one. But this does not affect at all the fact that, in its actual, explicit attitude, the proletariat in modern capitalist societies no longer appears as a class that tries to act to overthrow this society or even to reform it according to its own conception of what should be changed.

9. This same attitude exists among all classes and strata of the population and in relation to all social and collective activities. This is what shows—if there was need of it—that we are not talking about some circumstantial or temporary phenomenon, of a passing setback in the proletariat’s political consciousness. It is rather a deep-seated social phenomenon characteristic of the modern world. An infinitesimally small number of people are interested in public matters. The same minuscule proportion of unionized workers are interested in union affairs. The same negligible percentage of parents of school-age children are interested in the activities of parents’ associations. And the same inconsiderable minority who participate in any organized social group whatsoever show any interest in managing the affairs of that group. The *privatization* of individuals is the most striking trait of modern capitalist societies. We should become aware that we live in a society whose most important characteristic, as far as we are concerned here, is its success till now in destroying the socialization of individuals in terms of their political socialization. This is a society in which, outside the labor process, people more and more perceive themselves as private individuals and behave as such; in which the idea that collective action might be able to determine how things turn out on the societal scale has lost its meaning save for an insignificant minority (of bureaucrats or of revolutionaries, it matters little here). In modern society, public matters—or more exactly, social matters—are seen not only as foreign and hostile but also as beyond people’s grasp and not liable to be affected by their actions. It therefore sends people back into “private life,” or into a “social life” in which society itself is never explicitly put into question.

## *II. The Revolutionary Perspective in Traditional Marxism*

Those whom we shall call “traditional Marxists” refuse to face up to these facts. Some will concede that objective transformations have taken place in contemporary capitalism (as described in the first six main paragraphs in the preceding

section). But the changes in the class attitudes and activities in this society—especially those of the proletariat, and in particular this central phenomenon that we have called *privatization*—simply do not exist for them. Given the name of “depoliticization” or “political apathy,” it is described as merely temporary, transitory, the result of a “terrible defeat,” etc. The magic of words is thus used to make the reality of things disappear. One may hear it said, for example, that today’s depoliticization of the French proletariat needs no special explanation, it merely expresses a period of retreat after a serious defeat. But what defeat are they talking about? For a defeat, you need a battle. And the striking thing about the Gaullist regime’s taking of power is that it did so *without* a fight. Others try to “deepen” their argument: The defeat lies in the fact that there was no fight. But clearly the refusal to do battle in May 1958 expressed precisely this mass “apathy” or “depoliticization.” Hence, this explanation presupposes what it should be explaining. It is equally clear that no defeat is at the origin of the political apathy of the English, American, German, or Scandinavian proletariat.

Traditional Marxists also remain silent on more general questions. Do the objective changes in capitalism have no relation to the attitudes of people in society? If this is a transitory state of affairs, what is meant by the word “transitory”? This fleeting moment as well as the very existence of our galaxy are transitory events. How can and should revolutionaries act so that the present situation, whether “transitory” or not, can be overcome?

Other traditional Marxists simply refuse to recognize at all the transformations capitalism is undergoing and bringing about. They wait patiently for the next great economic crisis. They continue to speak about the pauperization of the proletariat, denounce growing capitalist profits at the same time that they try to demonstrate the historical tendency of the rate of profit to fall. This attitude is more consistent, not only because it refuses to recognize anything in reality that annoys it—a sort of delirium that is harder to attack the more radical and complete it becomes—but also because it is trying to save what for a century has passed for the foundation of the revolutionary outlook and revolutionary politics.

For those who think in traditional Marxist terms,<sup>14</sup> the transformations of capitalism we have described necessarily lead to the conclusion that revolutionary prospects have been wiped out. For the foundations for this perspective in the minds of traditional Marxists were the “objective contradictions of the capitalist economy,” on the one hand, and the system’s radical inability to satisfy the workers’ *economic* demands, on the other.

To be honest about it, there is no systematic theoretical answer in traditional Marxism to the following question: What leads the proletariat to undertake a kind of political activity that aims at transforming society?<sup>15</sup> But the practice of the movement for the past century and what can be called its spirit clearly points to the kind of answer Marxists usually have in mind. To be sure, we can dig up a few immortal quotations where the proletarian condition is viewed as a total condition affecting all aspects of its existence. But there is no use trying to hide the fact that both in current theory and in daily practice within the movement,

the main thing is the wage laborer's economic condition and, in particular, the fact that he is exploited when he sells his labor power and thus has a portion of what he produces expropriated.

On the theoretical level, all attention was turned toward capitalism's "objective contradictions" and its "inexorable economic mechanisms." These were supposed to be driving the system toward periodic crises and perhaps even toward its final collapse. At the same time, they made it impossible to satisfy the working class's consumer demands, forced wages to be reduced or wiped out the effect of any increases, periodically created massive unemployment and constantly threatened to throw the worker into the growing ranks of the industrial reserve army.

On the practical level, therefore, economic issues provided both the point of departure and the central themes for propaganda and agitation. Whence the primordial importance accorded to working in the unions, first to setting them up, then to "infiltrating" them. In brief, capitalist exploitation drove the proletariat to make economic demands that could not be satisfied within the confines of the established system. The experience or the awareness of this impossibility was supposed to get the workers to act politically in a way that would burst the system apart. Finally, the inner workings of the capitalist economy were supposed to produce crises—periodic breakdowns within the capitalist organization of society—that would allow the proletariat to intervene en masse in order to impose its own solutions.

No doubt these ideas corresponded to real features in the evolution of capitalism and of the activity of the proletariat from the nineteenth century up until around the Second World War. The absence of any organization within the capitalistic system gave completely free rein to "market mechanisms." They produced—they necessarily tended to produce—crises. Nothing a priori existed within liberal economics to limit the extent or the depths of these crises. And for a long time capitalism was bitterly opposed to any increases in the worker's standard of living. Struggles over economic demands were the point of departure for raising the class consciousness of large sections of the working class. Unions, which in their beginnings were much more than simple trade organizations, acted as a ferment for the working-class masses and provided a setting for the education of militants. Only because large sections of the proletariat actively participated in unions on an ongoing basis was it possible for great labor organizations to be set up, to grow, and to have an effect upon the development of the capitalist economy and capitalist society. Indeed, large unions never would have become what they have become without the laboring masses being ready at all times, through all their ups and downs, to support their action on key issues and to mobilize themselves politically beyond mere electoral activity.

It seemed just as obvious that, once they went beyond a certain level of breadth and intensity, struggles over economic demands necessarily would tend to raise the questions of who should have power and of how society in general should be organized. Two examples taken from the French postwar experience will highlight the meaning of this last point and also will show why the tradi-

tional viewpoint also may appear to French militants as corroborated by reality, even today.

From 1945 to 1950 French capitalism carried out the task of reconstruction amid general wastefulness and anarchy. But it followed a perfectly consistent chain of reasoning on one key point: Reconstruction takes place on the backs of the workers and is to be financed by lowering their standard of living and increasing their work load. Given the existence of certain inflationary mechanisms and given that the bourgeoisie was in charge of the economy, it is easy to understand how every overall wage hike was met almost immediately with a price hike effectively canceling it out. Because economic demands could not be satisfied within the existing framework, they necessarily led beyond the economic sphere. If the proletariat wanted to stop being overexploited, starting out with wage demands it had to go beyond these demands and raise the issue of who controls prices, the economy, and ultimately the State.

In 1957 and 1958, in order to finance the Algerian War without cutting into profits, French capitalism lowered the standard of living of wage earners. Under such conditions, demands for wage hikes could not—and did not—succeed. The problem posed is that of overall economic equilibrium. Demands for a *real* increase in wages could be satisfied only if the way in which the social product was divided was changed. Given the prevailing circumstances, this meant a halt to the war, thus opening up in full the country's political problems.<sup>16</sup>

But these situations are in no way typical. They express the peculiarities of French capitalism and its "backward" characteristics. Concretely speaking, they illustrate its inability to successfully establish a degree of "rational" management of the economy during such periods of crisis. This incapacity is intimately connected with its inability to set up its own political organization and leadership. Postwar reconstruction was carried out in most other capitalist countries under infinitely more chaotic conditions without creating tensions comparable to those that existed in France. The Algerian War could have been avoided—as the Indochina War could have been avoided, as war in Tunisia, Morocco, or in Black Africa *has been* avoided, as the English *have* avoided war in India, Ghana, and Nigeria. In any case, it could have been financed in a way that would not have created an explosive economic situation in France—as is shown by what has happened since May 1958.<sup>17</sup>

The more typical situation is that of all the other modern capitalist countries, where, since the war, struggles over economic demands, while sometimes taking place on a large scale and even in a violent fashion, have not put the political leadership of society into question, and still less its structure. Such a challenge has occurred neither objectively, nor in the heads of those who participate in these struggles.

But, just as nineteenth-century capitalism's apparent confirmation of these traditional conceptions did not suffice to give them a valid foundation, so their refutation by contemporary experience is not enough to decide their fate. In order to reach clear conclusions, we must discuss them on the properly theoretical level. This will lead us to a critical examination of Marxist political economy, the basics of which we can provide only a rough sketch here.<sup>18</sup>

## [Marxist Political Economy]

The undisputed and fundamental fact of capitalist society is that labor, as *wage labor*, is in thrall to capital. On the economic level, this servitude is expressed by the exploitation of wage labor, i.e., the ruling class's appropriation of a portion of the social product (surplus value) that it uses as it will. Under capitalism, this utilization of surplus value necessarily and in its essential part takes the form of *accumulation*, i.e., an increase in capital brought about by transforming a portion of surplus value into additional means of production. Combined with technical progress, accumulation leads to a permanent expansion of overall production *and* of production per worker (increased output or productivity). The development of capitalism signifies the destruction of precapitalist forms of production (feudal and small independent production) and the increasing proletarianization of society. At the same time, the struggle among capitalists brings about the concentration of capital, whether through the absorption or the elimination of the weakest capitalists or through voluntary mergers.

This definition of the broad characteristics of the capitalist economy constitutes one of Marx's immortal contributions to our knowledge of modern social reality. Marx had clearly perceived all this back when capitalism really existed only in a few cities in Western Europe. His analysis has been brilliantly confirmed by the evolution of capitalism over the period of a century and across five continents.

But a full economic analysis of capitalism ought to ask (and should attempt to answer) certain further questions about how the system *functions* and *evolves*. What, for example, determines the degree of capital's exploitation of wage labor, which is what Marx called the rate of exploitation (the relation of total surplus value or the mass of profits to the mass of wages)? And how does this rate vary over time? How can economic balance (a point of equilibrium between overall supply and overall demand) be achieved in a system where production and demand depend upon millions of independent acts? How can this equilibrium be maintained, particularly in a system where all relations are constantly being altered and overturned by the processes of accumulation and technical change? Finally, we should ask what the long-term tendencies of capitalism are as it changes through time. In other words, how does the very functioning of the system progressively modify its structure?

Again, it was Marx who first posed these questions clearly. He tried to respond systematically and coherently. Nevertheless, however rich in detail and significant in overall importance his monumental work devoted to these issues was, we must point out that the answers he gave are theoretically false and profoundly contradict what is, in our eyes, the spirit of his own revolutionary conceptions.

The cornerstone of all these problems is the determination of the rate of exploitation. For Marx, this rate depends exclusively upon objective economic factors that ensured that this rate could only go on increasing. That is to say, seen in terms of *economic exploitation*, the exploitation of workers under the capitalist system can only worsen. The rate of exploitation depends, in effect, upon two

factors: real product output per work-hour (or day or week) and the level of real wages. Real product output is constantly growing (through productivity increases) as a result of technical innovations and “closing the time gaps” in the workday. As for real wages, they are presented in *Capital* as a given. They are the “objective” cost of maintaining the working class’s “standard of living” in terms of commodities.

What determines this standard of living? “Historical and moral factors,” says Marx in volume 1 of *Capital*. But in his writings, the overall exposition of this question makes it clear that for Marx this standard of living ought at best<sup>19</sup> to be considered a constant. The workings of the labor market and the pressure exerted by the existence of the surplus work force, which are constantly being reproduced by capitalism itself, prevent living standards from ever rising in a significant and enduring way.<sup>20</sup>

[1965: “The rate of surplus value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labor power by capital, or of the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist” (*Capital* [New York: International Publishers, 1967], vol. 1, p. 218). In Marxist economics the rate of surplus value is expressed by the ratio

$$\frac{s}{v} = \frac{\text{surplus labor}}{\text{necessary labor}}.$$

Expressed in money terms, this is equivalent to

$$\frac{\text{total profits}}{\text{total wages}}$$

(*ibid.*, pp. 218-20).

Wages are the price of the *commodity* labor power.

*Wages*, as we have seen, are the *price* of a definite commodity, of labor power. *Wages* are, therefore, determined by the same laws that determine the price of every other commodity. (“Wage Labor and Capital,” *MESW*, p. 76)

And this price of labor power is presented in Marx’s writings as predetermined and oscillating around the *value* of labor power.

Supply and demand regulate nothing but the temporary *fluctuations* of market prices. They will explain to you why the market price of a commodity rises above or sinks below its *value*, but they can never account for that *value* itself. . . . At the moment when supply and demand equilibrate each other, and therefore cease to act, the *market* price of a commodity coincides with its *real value*, with the standard price round which its market price oscillates. . . . The same holds true of wages . . . wages being but a name for the price of labor. (“Wages, Price and Profit,” in *MESW*, pp. 200, 201)

If real wages are determined by the value of labor power, what determines this value? Marx was again quite explicit on this point. The value of labor power

is determined by the objective cost of maintaining the life of the worker and of his family.

What, then, is the *Value of Laboring Power*? Like that of every other commodity, its value is determined by the quantity of labor necessary to produce it. The laboring power of a man exists only in his living individuality. A certain mass of necessaries must be consumed by a man to grow up and maintain his life. . . . Beside the mass of necessaries required for *his own* maintenance, he wants another amount of necessaries to bring up a certain quota of children that are to replace him on the labor market and to perpetuate the race of laborers. Moreover, to develop his laboring power, and acquire a given skill, another amount of values must be spent. For our purpose it suffices to consider only *average* labor, the costs of whose education and development are vanishing magnitudes. . . .

. . . The *value of laboring power* is determined by the *value of the necessaries* required to produce, develop, maintain, and perpetuate the laboring power. (Ibid., pp. 210, 211)

This is the commodity equivalent of the standard of living of the working class. But what is it that determines that standard of living?

Marx admitted that “historical,” “moral,” and “social” factors entered into the determination of this standard of life.

The value of laboring power is formed by two elements—the one merely physical, the other historical or social. Its *ultimate limit* is determined by the *physical* element, that is to say, to maintain and reproduce itself, to perpetuate its physical existence, the working class must receive the necessaries absolutely indispensable for living and multiplying. The *value* of the indispensable necessaries forms, therefore, the ultimate limit of the *value of labor*. . . . Besides this mere physical element, the value of labor is in every country determined by a *traditional standard of life*. It is not mere physical life, but it is the satisfaction of certain wants springing from the social conditions in which people are placed and reared up. The English standard of life may be reduced to the Irish standard, the standard of life of a German peasant to that of a Livonian peasant. . . . This historical or social element, entering into the value of labor, may be expanded, or contracted, or altogether extinguished, so that nothing remains but the *physical limit*. (Ibid., p. 225)

. . . The number and extent of his so-called necessary wants, as also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves the products of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilization of a country, more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free laborers has been formed. In contradistinction therefore to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labor-power an historical and a moral factor. (*Capital*, vol. 1, p. 171)



In most of his writings, however, the overall exposition makes it clear that for Marx the value of labor power (and consequently of wages) tended to stay within narrow limits, if not actually to decline.

How far in this incessant struggle between capital and labor [is] the latter likely to prove successful[?] I might answer by a generalization, and say that, as with all other commodities, so with labor, its market price will, in the long run, adapt itself to its *value*; that, therefore, despite all the ups and downs, and *do what he may* [emphasis added—Au.], the working man will, on the average, only receive the value of his labor, which resolves itself into the value of his laboring power, which is determined by the value of the necessaries required for its maintenance and reproduction, which value of necessaries finally is regulated by the quantity of labor wanted to produce them. (“Wages, Price and Profit,” pp. 224-25)

Marx considered such a decline quite likely.

These very few hints [Marx basically is speaking here of how “in the progress of industry the demand for labor keeps, therefore, no pace with accumulation of capital”; *ibid.*, p. 228] will suffice to show that the very development of modern industry must progressively turn the scale in favor of the capitalist against the working man, and consequently the general tendency of capitalist production is not to raise but to sink the average standard of wages, or to push the *value of labor* more and more to its *minimum limit*. . . . [Working-class] struggles for the standard of wages are incidents inseparable from the whole wages system. . . . In 99 cases out of 100 their efforts at raising wages are only efforts at maintaining the given value of labor. . . . The working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects, that they are retarding the downward movement but not changing its direction. (*Ibid.*, p. 228)

Thus the forest of uplifted arms demanding work becomes ever thicker while the arms themselves become ever thinner. (*Wage Labor and Capital*, p. 78)

As for the “historical factor,” it might determine differences from one country to another, but there is little in Marx’s writings to suggest that it could account for *changes*—and in particular for *increases*—in the value of labor power, in a given country, over a given period of time. On the contrary,

In any given country, at a given period, the average quantity of the means of subsistence necessary for the laborer may be regarded as a fixed quantity. (*Capital*, vol. 1, p. 159 [T/E: slightly altered])

and

The general tendency of capitalist production is not to raise, but to

sink the average standard of wages, or to push the *value of labor* more or less to its *minimum limit*. (“Wages, Price and Profit,” p. 228)

Marx’s whole system of political economy, his whole theory of crises, and—by implication—his assumptions as to how socialist consciousness arose were all based on this theory of wages. They were based more specifically on the premise that the mechanisms of the labor market, the changes in the organic composition of capital, and the pressures of an ever-increasing working-class population (which capitalism constantly tended to produce) would prevent real wages (i.e., the standard of living) from ever increasing in a lasting and significant manner. At best living standards would remain static. The capitalists constantly tend to reduce them. They are forced to. And since, in the pages of *Capital*, nothing opposes this tendency except at the point where it threatens the biological survival of the working class, the capitalists achieve their aim. This is the meaning of “absolute pauperization.”]

[1979: Commenting on Marx’s statement in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that “the natural price of labor is no other than the minimum wage” (and a little below that: “The minimum wage is nonetheless the center towards which the current rates of wages gravitate”), Engels wrote in 1885:

The thesis that the “natural,” i.e., normal, price of labor-power coincides with the minimum wage, i.e., with the equivalent in value of the means of subsistence absolutely indispensable for the life and procreation of the worker, was first put forward by me in *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy (Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, Paris, 1844)* and in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. As seen here, Marx at that time accepted the thesis. Lassalle took it over from both of us. Although, however, in reality wages have a constant tendency to approach the minimum, the above thesis is nevertheless incorrect. The fact that labor-power is regularly and on the average paid below its value cannot alter its value. In *Capital*, Marx has put the above thesis right (section on the Buying and Selling of Labor-Power) and also (Chapter 25: “The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation”) analyzed the circumstances which permit capitalist production to depress the price of labor-power more and more below its value. (*MECW*, vol. 5, p. 125)

We need not examine at length the embarrassment exhibited by Engels in this argument. Engels, and Marx too in this regard, wants to have his cake and eat it too. If, not accidentally and for a few months, but “regularly and on the average,” labor power is “paid below its value,” then the costs of producing and reproducing labor power are determined (for a given level of prices or unit values) by this actual payment; it is the physical component (the “means of subsistence”) corresponding to this actual payment that sets “the value of labor power,” and any other “value” of this labor power is a purely metaphysical chimaera. If the standard of living of the working class contains a “historical element,” the “circumstances which permit capitalist production to depress the price of labor-power more and more below its value” quite obviously form part

of this “historical” element. *Therefore*, under capitalism “historical” factors would tend to depress this standard of living more and more, and thereby the “value of labor power.”

But the basic question *does not lie here*. What the logic of Marx’s argument on the increase in the rate of exploitation necessitates is neither a “minimum” standard of living for the working class nor a reduction of this standard toward a “minimum,” but rather its *constancy*. Marx should be able to grant perfectly well that this living standard is, from the outset, many times higher than the “biological minimum” (assuming that this last phrase made any sense—in truth, it does not), and that it does not diminish under capitalism. Given the incontestable fact that labor productivity rises under capitalism, and hence that the unit values of commodities that enter into working-class consumption are reduced, he could still “deduce” that the *value* of labor power (as a product of this quantity of commodities it remains constant; in terms of their unit values it decreases) diminishes under capitalism merely through the functioning of the economy. He also could conclude that, with a constant duration of the working day, the rate of exploitation (or the rate of surplus value) can only continue to increase. In Marx’s presentation and in his argument, as much as there is an argument on the rate of exploitation, it is both necessary and sufficient for the working class’s living standard to remain *constant*.

This argument certainly could be made a little more flexible. There could be an increase in the rate of exploitation even with the working class’s standard of living rising, provided that this rise is “less rapid” than the fall in the unit values of workers’ consumer commodities (in other words, less rapid than the rise in labor productivity in industries producing these commodities). But first of all, this could never be proved either logically or in general; it would be a question of *fact*. Second, and above all, the theory would then be obliged to say something about the factors that make living standards rise, and rise more or less rapidly. Now, among these factors, the principal one is the workers’ struggle against exploitation; this factor is both “extraeconomic” and, by its essence, *indeterminate*. The theory would be obliged to admit that, *qua* economic theory, it has almost nothing to say about what determines the behavior of, and changes in, the system’s central variable, namely, the rate of exploitation (which codetermines to a decisive degree the rate of accumulation, etc.). We see thereby that the need to postulate a nonminimum, but *constant* (or “given,” as Marx says), working-class standard of living even goes beyond the exigencies of demonstrating the “rise in the rate of exploitation”; it is implied in every attempt to construct an economic theory as a theory of “*objective determinations*” of the economic process. In a different way, Piero Sraffa has implicitly come to a similar conclusion in *Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).]

We should point out that this conception is equivalent to treating workers in theory as capitalism would like to treat the producers in actual practice . . . but cannot, that is, as pure and simple *objects*. It is tantamount to saying that labor power is *completely* a commodity, like sugar<sup>21</sup> or electric power. According to this assumption, labor power, like any commodity, possesses an exchange value (cor-

responding to an objective cost determined by market forces) and a use value (the extraction of which, like the extraction of so many calories from a ton of coal, depends only on the will of the capitalist and on his production methods). No more than a piece of coal could labor power influence its own exchange value. Nor can it prevent capitalists from increasing the energy extracted from it, through ever more perfected methods of utilizing this resource.

Once again, we have here a tendency of capitalism. This is certain. But as is already well known, and for reasons that we will bring to light later on, this tendency can never completely prevail. And if it ever did, capitalism would collapse immediately. Capitalism cannot exist without the proletariat, and the proletariat would not be the proletariat if it did not struggle constantly to change the conditions of its existence, both with respect to its fate in production and to its "standard of living." Far from being completely dominated by the will of the capitalist and forced to increase indefinitely the yield of labor, production is determined just as much by the workers' individual and collective resistance to such increases. The extraction of "use value from labor power" is not a technical operation; it is a process of bitter struggle in which half the time, so to speak, the capitalists turn out to be losers.

The same thing holds true for living standards, i.e., real wage levels. From its beginnings, the working class has fought to reduce the length of the workday and to raise wage levels. It is this struggle that has determined how these levels have risen and fallen over the years. If it is more or less true that, at a given moment, an individual worker's wage level appears as an objectively given fact that is independent of his action,<sup>22</sup> it is completely wrong to say that wage levels over a given period vary independently of the working class's action.

Neither the actual labor rendered during an hour of labor time nor the wage received in exchange for this work can be determined by any kind of "objective" law, norm, or calculation. If they could be, capitalism would be a rational system or at least rationalizable, and all discussion of socialism would be in vain.

What we are saying does not mean that specifically economic or even "objective" factors play no role in determining wage levels. Quite the contrary. At any given instant, the class struggle comes into play only within a given economic—and, more generally, an objective—framework, and it acts not only directly but also through the intermediary of a series of partial "economic mechanisms." To give only one example among thousands, an economic victory for workers in one sector has a ripple effect on overall wage levels, not only because it can encourage other workers to be more combative, but also because sectors with lower wage levels will experience greater difficulties recruiting manpower. None of these mechanisms, however, can effectively act on its own and have its own significance if taken separately from the class struggle. And the economic context itself is always gradually being affected one way or another by this struggle.

Conversely, we should point out that our analysis here only refers to *Capital*. In "Wages, Price and Profit" (an address delivered to English workers long before *Capital*), Marx clearly defends the correct idea that the workers' struggle *can* improve wage levels. This idea was abandoned in *Capital* in favor of the objectivist conception discussed here. It truly would be impossible to use this idea

as a foundation for the kind of capitalist mechanics Marx tries to establish in *Capital*.

[1979: The sentence about “Wages, Price and Profits” in the preceding paragraph contains two errors. This address was delivered in 1865, i.e., just two years before the publication of volume 1 of *Capital*—to which, moreover, Marx had already devoted a not inconsiderable amount of time. On the other hand, as the quotations cited previously show, if Marx recognizes in this text that the working-class struggle can exert a passing influence upon wage levels (and of course, too, the workers could not “renounce their resistance” without becoming “degraded”), he concludes from this no less, in the most overwhelming and categorical fashion, that this struggle can only “retard this downward movement” but not “change its direction.”

I can explain this error on my part only by referring to my tendency at the time to see in Marx an evolutionary movement that estranged him from the revolutionary inspirations of his youth so as to make him into a “systematic” theoretician. Now, such a movement is wholly relative. In truth, what I called the two antinomic elements of Marx’s thought—the revolutionary, anti-speculative germ and the theory-laden, systematic, objectivist, deterministic element—coexist in Marx’s work from his very first writings. See now Chapter 1 of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, particularly section 4 (“The Two Elements of Marxism and Their Historical Fate”), and section 5 of the “General Introduction.”]

The claim that wages *cannot* increase is just as erroneous. That each capitalist and the capitalist class taken as a whole oppose such increases as much as they can is certainly true. But the assertion that it is impossible for the system to allow such increases is completely false. The classical idea was that capitalism could not withstand wage increases because such increases automatically would mean lower profits, hence reduced funds for accumulation that are indispensable for the firm to survive under conditions of competition. But this static image is quite unreal.

Let output from workers increase 4 percent in a year and wages by the same percentage. Profits also necessarily increase by 4 percent, everything else being equal. And if wage pressures lead to basically similar increases in all enterprises and all sectors, no capitalist will be in an unfavorable position vis-à-vis his competitors. As long as wage increases do not substantially and lastingly exceed productivity increases, and as long as they are generalized across the system, wage increases are perfectly compatible with capital expansion.

On a strictly economic plane (and ignoring the role they can play in riveting workers to production), in the last analysis such increases even are indispensable. In an economy growing 3 percent a year on average, where wages account for 50 percent of end-use demand, any gap of substantial magnitude between the rate of wage increases and the rate of expansion of production would create tremendous imbalances in a relatively short time. And it would be impossible to siphon off excess production; not even the deepest of “depressions” could correct this problem. Production that increases 3 percent a year doubles nearly every twenty-three years. At the end of a century, it will have increased twentyfold. If

net production in the capitalist sector in France was 100 units per worker employed in 1860, it would be 2,000 units today. The theory of absolute pauperization means that if wages were 50 units in 1860, they would be less than 50 units today. In other words, wages today would represent less than 50/2,000 (or less than 2.5 percent) of the net product in the capitalist sector! However massive the volume of capital accumulation, of export capital, of State expenditures, etc., under such conditions it would be absolutely impossible to dispose of everything produced.

In fact, the result of the class struggle till now has been an increase in real wages that, in the long-term, has been roughly parallel with increases in labor productivity. To put it in other terms, the proletariat has not succeeded—at least, not substantially—in modifying to its advantage the distribution of the social product, but it has successfully avoided having this distribution modified in a way that would be to its disadvantage. The long-term rate of exploitation has remained almost constant. Why the class struggle has had this result till now and not another one is too large a question for us to broach right here and now.

Marx's theory of the increasing rate of exploitation has played—and continues to play—a role in the traditional conceptions of the Marxist movement insofar as this rise appears to it to be the motive force of the class struggle. But it also is of central importance to the movement's analysis of the conditions for the capitalist economy's state of dynamic equilibrium as well as for its "contradictions."

[1965: This is seen most clearly in the introduction Engels wrote to Marx's "Wage Labor and Capital" in 1891 (i.e., more than twenty years after the publication of *Capital*):

From the whole mass of products produced by it, the working class, therefore, receives back only a part for itself. . . . The other part, which the capitalist class keeps . . . becomes larger with every new discovery and invention, while the part falling to the share of the working class (reckoned per head) either increases only very slowly and inconsiderably or not at all, and under certain circumstances may even fall. But these discoveries and inventions which supersede each other at an ever-increasing rate, this productivity of human labor which rises day by day to an extent previously unheard of, finally give rise to a conflict in which the present-day capitalist economy must perish. On the one hand are immeasurable riches and a superfluity of products which the purchasers cannot cope with; on the other hand, the great mass of society proletarianized, turned into wage-workers, and precisely for that reason made incapable of appropriating for themselves this superfluity of products. The division of society into a small, excessively rich class and a large, propertyless class of wage workers results in a society suffocating from its own superfluity, while the great majority of its members is scarcely, or even not at all, protected from extreme want. (Introduction to "Wage Labor and Capital," in *MESW*, p. 70)]

The "objective dynamic of capitalism's economic contradictions" is supposed

to result from the conflict between capitalism's tendency toward unlimited development of the productive forces and the limited development, under capitalism, of society's ability to consume (economic ability, of course, not biological). This limitation in the ability to consume was seen as a reflection of the stagnation in the working class's living standards, or as a reflection of the fact that this standard of living increased too slowly in comparison with production. The only way this conflict could allow capital accumulation to occur would be if it were accompanied by periodic crises that would destroy a portion of existing wealth. It might even eventually make this kind of accumulation impossible.<sup>23</sup>

It directly follows from what we just have said that this conflict does not create any absolute or insurmountable contradictions. This conflict is real, up to a certain point. Capitalism really does increase production, and this increase is not automatically and necessarily accompanied by a corresponding increase in solvent social demand. But there is no insurmountable contradiction: Solvent social demand *can* be increased without the sky falling. This can come about as the result of working-class struggles that end up increasing wages; it could be a consequence of an increase in capitalist accumulation; or it could be the effect of a conscious State policy toward increasing state expenditures.<sup>24</sup>

*[Accumulation without Crises and the Effects of Automation]*

In our eyes, this last point fundamentally settles the question, for it shows that the problem of achieving a dynamic equilibrium in a capitalist economy is a *relative* one. In volume 2 of *Capital*, it was Marx himself who was the first to show that accumulation without crises was *possible*, provided certain proportions between economic magnitudes were kept. His formulas can easily be generalized.

Accumulation without crises is possible if, starting out from a state of equilibrium, all economic magnitudes increase proportionately—or if different rates of growth among these magnitudes compensate for one another. If, for example, in an economy with a static population, annual accumulation (i.e., net annual increase in capital) is 3 percent of existing capital and if, thereby,<sup>25</sup> productivity per man-hour also increases 3 percent, for economic balance to be preserved indefinitely, it is both necessary and sufficient that wages and unproductive consumption among capitalists (and included in the latter is State consumption) also increase by 3 percent a year.

If, in this same economy, the ratios among economic magnitudes are altered, adjustments *can* be made to reestablish equilibrium. If, for example, capitalists succeed in imposing a reduction in real wages, but increase their unproductive consumption or State expenditures to a corresponding degree, balance will be maintained. The same holds true if they reduce capital accumulation in order to increase State expenditures. In these last two instances, the economy's rate of growth will be different from what it otherwise would have been. And the distribution of the forces of production between production of the means of production and production of objects of consumption will have to be modified, either gradually or abruptly.

Now, the capitalist economy, left to the play of market forces, certainly con-

tains no mechanism guaranteeing this proportional growth in its component magnitudes or adjusting these increases to one another. Or rather, this “adjustment mechanism” is none other than economic crisis itself (a crisis of overproduction). The spontaneous evolution of the capitalist economy actually tends to produce imbalances on a regular basis. Phases of expansion are necessarily phases of accelerated accumulation during which productive capacity tends to increase more rapidly than end-use demand for consumer goods. This leads to overproduction, to a brake being put on the process of accumulation—and to crisis. In an attenuated form the same phenomenon of alternating buoyancy and recession persists in contemporary capitalism and is the result of the same factors.

But capital concentration and increasing State intervention signify precisely that the capitalist economy no longer is completely left to the play of market forces—in any case, not with respect to the problem of crises, which in the eyes of capitalists is the most important problem since it periodically puts the stability of their power over society back into question. State intervention is precisely this factor that now compensates for economic imbalances and that was absent from classical capitalism.

By increasing or reducing its own net demand for goods and services, the State becomes the regulator of the level of overall demand. Specifically, it can compensate for a deficiency in this demand that is at the origin of overproduction crises.<sup>26</sup> That this intervention by the capitalist State is itself characterized by the same kind of irrationalities and deep-seated anarchy found in the bureaucratic-capitalist management of society as a whole is incontestable. That it creates conflicts and imbalances at other levels is certain (more about these later). But a crisis of 1929 proportions is henceforth inconceivable outside of a sudden epidemic of collective lunacy in the capitalist class.

This should have been clear long ago for anyone prepared to admit that the mere suppression of private property and the classical market did not suffice to abolish capitalism. If indeed one admits that the total concentration of the means of production in the hands of a single capitalist company or of the State does not remove their capitalistic character—as Marx, Engels, and Lenin granted—as long as a particular stratum dominates production and society, one is obliged to admit immediately that economic overproduction crises are a relatively superficial phenomenon belonging merely to one particular phase of capitalism. Where are the overproduction crises in a completely bureaucratic-capitalist economy—such as in Russia, for example? Indeed, in this case the bureaucracy’s deep-seated and inevitable inability to plan rationally, even from its own point of view, clearly is not expressed and cannot be expressed in general crises of overproduction. If they did manifest themselves, “overproduction” crises would have no more or less significance than any other expression of the incoherence of bureaucratic planning.<sup>27</sup>

Even more important for Marx than overproduction crises were the great tendencies or “laws” that he had believed he could discern in the evolution of capitalism: the increasing rate of exploitation, the rise in the organic composition of



capital (elimination of workers by machines), and the falling rate of profit. Marx thought these more important because they were the source of overproduction crises and because they would lead to greater and greater crises of this sort throughout the history of capitalism. In effect, the increasing rate of exploitation and the rise in the organic composition of capital together lead to a relative or absolute reduction in the mass of wages, hence to a reduced demand for consumer goods parallel to the increase in the production of these goods, hence to overproduction. During each accompanying crisis, the rate of exploitation in the meantime has grown and the organic composition of capital has risen—thus rendering it more difficult to overcome the next crisis. These tendencies are of greater importance than overproduction crises because they express what is “impossible” for capitalism to do. Production cannot keep increasing indefinitely while the end-use demand for objects of consumption stagnates owing to an increase in the rate of exploitation. Accumulation could not continue without slowing down if its source (the mass of profits) begins to dry up in relation to the mass of capital (due to the falling rate of profit). Capitalism, finally, could not continue both to proletarianize society and to condemn a growing mass of proletarians to unemployment (the “law” of the rise in the organic composition of capital and the concomitant growth of the reserve army of the unemployed).

But such “impossibilities” are imaginary. We have shown here that there is no “law” decreeing an increased rate of exploitation, and that, on the contrary, it is a long-term state of constancy in the rate of exploitation that corresponds to the necessities of the capitalist economy. We have shown elsewhere<sup>28</sup> that the “law of the falling rate of profit” is inconsistent and indeed totally meaningless. Finally, the undeniable rise in the organic composition of capital (the fact that the same number of workers handle an ever-increasing quantity of machines, raw materials, etc.), although of fundamental importance for the evolution of production and of the economy in other respects, has not at all had the result Marx attributed to it. It has not led to a long-term rise in unemployment or to the creation of an industrial reserve army.

Here again, as with the question of crises, a relative problem has been erected into an absolute contradiction. The replacement of workers by machines in one sector may or may not lead to a lasting increase in unemployment. This will depend upon whether certain conditions are fulfilled, among which the most important ones are the primary and secondary employment created by the construction of the new machinery and above all the pace of accumulation in other sectors of the economy. Now, these conditions depend upon several factors, among which a decisive role is played by the rate of exploitation, which is itself, as we already have said, basically dependent upon the class struggle. Thus it turns out that the workers’ struggle for wage increases has contributed indirectly (and unintentionally) to limiting the importance of technological unemployment.

For academic economists, high wages reinforce the tendency of capitalists to introduce inventions and make investments that will lead to economic savings on living labor. Wage increases therefore ought to favor unemployment. But, as Joan Robinson has remarked (in *The Rate of Interest and Other Essays*, p. 52),

this argument forgets that the capitalist records in his account books not absolute wage levels but the difference between the wages he pays workers and the cost of the machines that would be used to replace them. Now, this cost also is a function of wage levels. A general wage hike therefore does not alter the conditions under which the capitalist makes his choice.

For our own part, let us add that the true relation between wage levels and employment is rather the *contrary* of that suggested by academic economists. For the higher the wage level, the greater the quantity of (primary and secondary) employment created by a given level of investment. And consequently, the smaller will be the reduction in final net employment brought on by an investment designed to economize on labor. This is the case because what, since Keynes, is called the "employment multiplier" is, in Marxist terms, nothing other than the inverse of the rate of exploitation. The smaller the rate of exploitation, the greater the total quantity of employment created by an investment. The result is that, in struggling for higher wages, the working class at the same time is fighting against the employment effects of labor-saving inventions.

[1965: Let  $X$  be the net annual product of the economy,  $p$  the net product per hour of work,  $N$  the total employment (measured in hours of work),  $w$  the hourly wage,  $I$  the net investment, and  $G$  the unproductive consumption of capitalists (private and governmental). Then, by definition:

$$X = pN \text{ and } X = I + G + wN.$$

Therefore,

$$\begin{aligned} pN &= I + G + wN \\ pN - wN &= I + G \\ N(p - w) &= I + G, \text{ or } N = \frac{(I + G)}{(p - w)}. \end{aligned}$$

It will be seen that the smaller  $(p - w)$ , that is, the greater  $w$  in relation to  $p$  (or in other words, the lower the rate of exploitation), the higher will be the quantity of employment corresponding to a given level of investment (and/or consumption of the capitalists).]

[1965: The problem of technological unemployment has emerged again in the last few years, especially in the United States, under the guise of the "effects of automation." This is not the place fully to discuss the impact and significance of automation, which raises issues far deeper than the merely economic ones. For the moment let us concern ourselves strictly with the effects of automation on the quantity of total employment.

It must be stressed first of all that in this respect there is nothing qualitatively new in automation. Between automation and other forms of capitalist rationalization there is only a difference in degree, concerning the rate at which living labor is replaced by machines. Under certain circumstances that we will now attempt to analyze, these differences (which are not governed by blind economic laws) may become decisive.

For over a century now, in a country like the United States (or, for that matter, in any other advanced capitalist country), output per man-hour has been rising at an average compound rate of roughly 2.5 percent per annum. This is tantamount to saying that the labor input necessary to produce a given volume of

output has been falling by approximately 2.5 percent per annum, year in, year out. This means again that the total output of a century ago could today be produced with only 8 percent of what the labor force was at that time. If nothing else happened, this rise in the productivity of labor would have led to a mass of unemployed equal to 92 percent of the working population of a century ago! To these millions of unemployed one would of course have to add the whole population increase that has taken place over 100 years. This absurd situation could never have materialized: The system would have exploded several times over on its way to it. In fact, the system has been able not only to reemploy the labor force released through mechanization, but also to employ practically all the additional labor force generated by the growth of the population (and, in the case of the United States, the huge labor force provided by immigration as well). In fact, *total employment in the United States today is almost seven times greater than a century ago (68 million, as against 10.5 million in 1860).*

How did this take place? First, of course, through the huge and more or less continuous expansion in demand (and output). Demand for commodities (and services) is, in the last analysis (and except in a science-fiction world where everything is fully automated, including surgical operations), a demand for labor. At every level of mechanization and automation, the demand for a given quantity of commodities is translated into a demand for a different quantity of labor. Technical progress means precisely that: that a given demand for commodities can be satisfied with less labor. *But there is always a rate of expansion of demand that can absorb the labor force released through technological progress.*

Assume that every year 2.5 percent of the existing labor force is released through mechanization. Assume in addition that the “natural” growth of the labor force is 1 percent per annum. Then demand needs to increase by about 3.5 percent per annum to absorb the available labor.

This assumes that working hours per week (or per year) remain constant. This they need not be—and have not been. The second way whereby the effects of productivity increases are absorbed is, as is well known, the shortening of the working week or of the “hour content” of the working year. This has also happened. The average working week has declined from perhaps seventy hours a century ago to forty to fifty hours at present.

If under “automation” the growth of output per man-hour becomes *substantially* higher than before (and, consequently, the speed at which workers become “redundant” in the automated jobs increases), for equilibrium to be preserved, demand should rise correspondingly faster and/or hours of work decline in a correspondingly steeper way.

This is as far as economics will take us. There is no automatic mechanism built into the system guaranteeing that demand will in fact rise faster. But neither is there any mechanism preventing demand from rising sufficiently fast. Here again, the decisive factor is the action of men, social groups, and classes. If the workers succeed in imposing a rate of increase in real wages (and/or leisure) corresponding to the new, higher rate of growth of productivity, this would suffice to maintain the system in balance, with greater momentum. Alternatively, if the capitalists and their State realize the importance of the problem and step up

to a sufficient degree other types of demand (be it weapons, education, space travel, or capital transfers to underdeveloped countries), balance can also be maintained. And various combinations of these two factors might achieve the same result.

The problem of automation is not therefore an economic one, but a social and political one. And it is social and political factors that might give automation an explosive significance in the United States today. The fact that American capitalism is far from fully centralized, that its management is still dominated by obsolete ideas and attitudes (as was seen in the Congress vs. Kennedy controversy concerning tax cuts), may, if combined with an accelerated introduction of automation, lead to a crisis. This crisis in turn would only lead to further centralization and bureaucratization if it was not seized upon by the masses as an occasion to overthrow the system.

To repeat, in all this we have only considered the broad quantitative effects of automation on employment. There are, of course, other aspects to it, which in the final analysis are more important: The types of labor required in a more or less automated economy are different from the ones previously in demand, the location of work may be different, the structure of the labor force and the type of work performed will undergo profound transformations, etc.]

The really important tendencies in the long-term evolution of capitalism should not be sought in the realm of economics proper, and for a very simple reason. This evolution brings about a modification in capitalism's economic *structures* and thereby a more or less profound transformation of its economic laws. The relations and laws within a competitive capitalist economy are not the same as those in an economy dominated by monopolies. And the latter are very different from those prevailing in a completely bureaucratic capitalist economy (where the means of production are State-run and an overall production plan is put into force). What is common to these different stages are the evolutionary tendencies of *production* itself: the increasing alienation of the worker, capitalist mechanization and "rationalization," and their corollary: concentration. And, above all, all these systems include what is the determining factor in this whole evolutionary process: the class struggle. We will return to this point later.

We have tried to show in a succinct fashion that the economic system developed by Marx in *Capital* (not to mention its vulgarizations) does not account for the functioning and evolution of capitalism. If we reflect on the meaning of this critique we notice that what continually crops up as the source of doubts and errors in *Capital* is its methodology. Marx's theory of wages and its corollary, the theory of the increasing rate of exploitation, both start out from the same postulate: that the worker really is completely reduced by capital to the status of an object (into a commodity). The crisis theory also starts from a postulate that is basically analogous to this first one: that people and classes (in this case, the capitalist class) can do nothing about the functioning of the economy.

These postulates are false, but they also have a deeper significance. They both are required for economics to become a science in the sense of the natural sciences. To become a science of this sort, the *object* of study in economics must

be made up of *objects*. And it is indeed as pure and simple objects that workers and capitalists appear in the pages of *Capital*. They are only blind and unconscious instruments realizing through their actions what is imposed upon them by "economic laws." If economics is to become a mechanics of society, it must deal with phenomena ruled by "objective" laws that are themselves independent of the action of people and classes. We end up with the following fantastic paradox: Marx, who discovered class struggle, wrote a monumental work analyzing the development of capitalism from which the class struggle is totally absent.

This view of history is an expression of the influence capitalist ideology exerted over Marx, for these postulates and this method express, in their depths, the essence of the capitalist vision of man. We will return to this point. But we cannot close this critical examination of Marxist economics without trying to bring out clearly its political implications.

*[Political Implications of the "Classical" Theory]*

What, according to the traditional Marxist theory, is the worker's consciousness? It is a consciousness of poverty, and nothing more. The worker has economic demands to which the system has given rise. He learns from experience that the system prevents these needs from being satisfied. This may lead him to revolt. But what will be the object of this revolt? A greater satisfaction of his material needs. If this conception were true, all that the worker could learn under capitalism is that he wishes to consume more and that capitalism is incapable of offering him this higher level of consumption.

The proletariat could destroy such a society. But with what would the proletariat replace it? No positive content, nothing new capable of providing the foundation for the reconstruction of society could arise out of a mere awareness of poverty. From its experience of life under capitalism the proletariat could derive no new principles either for organizing this new society or for orienting it in another direction. Under such conditions, the proletarian revolution becomes, briefly speaking, a simple reflex of revolt against hunger. It is impossible to see how socialist society could ever be the result of such a reflex.

And what is at the origin of capitalism's contradictions, its sundry crises and its *historical* crisis? According to the classical view, they all have their origin in "private appropriation," in other words, in private property and the market. This is the obstacle to the "development of the productive forces," which, moreover, supposedly is the sole, true, and eternal objective of human societies. This critique of capitalism ultimately ends up saying that the forces of production are not developing fast enough (which in turn boils down to saying that it is not capitalistic enough). To achieve "a more rapid development of the forces of production," one would only have to eliminate private property and the market. Nationalization of the means of production and planning would then provide the solution to the crisis of contemporary society.

The workers do not know this and cannot know it. Their situation forces them to suffer the consequences of capitalism's contradictions, but in no way does it lead them to discover its causes. An acquaintance with these causes

comes not from experiencing the production process but from theoretical knowledge bearing upon the functioning of the capitalist economy. This knowledge may be accessible to individual workers, but not to the proletariat *qua* proletariat. Driven by its revolt against poverty, but incapable of self-direction since its experience does not give it a privileged viewpoint on reality, the proletariat, according to this outlook, can only be an infantry in the service of a general staff of specialists. These specialists themselves *know* (from considerations that the proletariat as such does not have access to) what is going wrong with present-day society and how it must be modified. The traditional view of the economy and its revolutionary perspective can only found, and actually throughout history has only founded, a *bureaucratic politics*.

To be sure, Marx himself did not draw such conclusions from his economic theory. Most of the time his political positions went completely in the opposite direction. But what we have outlined are the consequences that follow objectively from this theory. And they have been affirmed in an ever clearer fashion within the actual historical movement of Marxism, culminating in Stalinism.

This objectivist view of the economy and history can only be the source of a bureaucratic politics. That is to say, it can only end in a politics that, while preserving the essence of capitalism, tries to improve its operation.

## [MCR II]

### *III. The Fundamental Contradiction of Capitalism*

Capitalism is the first society in history we know of that is organized in such a way that it contains an insurmountable internal contradiction. The term "contradiction," however, has been tossed around by generations of Marxists and pseudo-Marxists until it has lost all meaning. It was used improperly by Marx himself when he talked about the contradiction between the "forces of production" and the "relations of production." As we shall see later on, such a "contradiction" is quite meaningless.

Like other historical societies, capitalism is a society divided into classes. In all class-divided societies, the respective classes oppose each other because their interests are in conflict. But the mere existence of classes and exploitation as such do not by themselves create contradictions. They simply determine an opposition or a conflict between two social groups.

There is no *contradiction* in a slave society or in a feudal society, however violent the *conflict* between exploiters and exploited. These societies are "well ordered": Social norms and class domination require of individuals conduct that might be inhuman and oppressive, but nevertheless possible and internally consistent. What the master imposes on the slave, and the feudal lord on the serf, contains no internal contradiction. It is realizable so long as the master does not "go too far." But in such a case it is the master who has gone beyond the norms of the system. In his own interests as a master, he thus has to look after the condition of the slaves so as to ensure output, just as he does with his livestock.

Even when circumstances permitted or even obliged masters to treat slaves in a way that may have led to their physical extermination, there was no “contradiction.” It is logical to kill lambs when meat is expensive and wool is too cheap. That the lambs may not let this happen is another story.

Once established, the evolution of such societies is not determined during normal times by class struggle. True, slaves can revolt against the masters, serfs can burn down the lord’s castle, but the two terms of the conflict remain external to one another. There is no dialectic common to master and slave, save for philosophy on the astral level it inhabits. There is no concrete, shared dialectic, and the daily activity of the exploited does not every day oblige the exploiters to transform their society.

Capitalism, on the contrary, is built on an intrinsic contradiction—on a real contradiction, in the literal sense of the term. The capitalist organization of society is contradictory in the same way that a neurotic individual is so: It can try to carry out its intentions only through acts that constantly thwart these same intentions.

Let us look at this first at the most basic level: at the point of production. The capitalist system can only maintain itself by continually trying to reduce wage earners to the level of pure *executants*—and it functions only to the extent that it never succeeds in so reducing them. Capitalism is constantly obliged to solicit the *participation* of wage earners in the production process and yet it also tends to render this participation impossible.<sup>29</sup> This same contradiction is found again, in an almost identical form, in the domains of politics and culture. This contradiction constitutes the fundamental fact of capitalism, the kernel of capitalist social relations.

This relation appears in the history of society only when certain conditions are simultaneously fulfilled:

1. Generalized wage labor.
2. An evolving, as distinct from a static, technology.
3. The general political and cultural background provided by a bourgeois-democratic revolution.

1. Production based on *wage labor* must have become the dominant productive relation. Wage labor here has a twofold signification.

a) In wage labor, direction and execution of activities are virtually separated from the start. And more and more, they tend to diverge. Not only the *objectives* of production but also the *methods* and the *means* of production—the very unfolding of the labor process—tend to be determined to an increasing degree by someone other than the worker directly doing the job. The command of the activity tends to be transposed outside the subject of this activity.

In a sense, the command of activity is always “outside the subject of the activity” wherever value is extracted by exploiters from the labor of those they exploit. This would apply, for instance, to the work of slaves. But this external command *remains* external to the activity; the master limits himself to setting the objective of the activity. He sets the slave to his task. He makes sure that the

slave carries out his task or that he does not stop working. But the labor process itself is not “commanded.” The methods (as well as the instruments) of labor are traditional. They have been incorporated into the slave once and for all. At most there is a need to oversee work to make sure the slave carries out permanently prescribed methods. But the master has no need to constantly *penetrate* into the labor process in order to revolutionize it. The contradiction of capitalism is that it implies at one and the same time a type of command that is external to productive activity and a type of command that is *constantly obliged to penetrate into* this activity, to dictate the methods, even the most elementary gestures, to be used.

b) In the wage relation, both the remuneration of the worker and the effort he must furnish are by their essence indefinite. No objective rule, no calculation, no accepted social convention permits one to say, in a capitalist society, what a fair wage is—or just how much effort should be furnished during an hour of labor time. At the beginnings of the history of capitalism, this essential indeterminacy was masked by habits and tradition.<sup>30</sup> But it clearly comes to the fore when the proletariat begins to fight against the way things are. From this moment on, the “labor contract,” always provisional and renewable, rests solely upon the relation of forces existing between the two parties. Its implementation can take place only under the terms of an incessant war between capitalists and workers.<sup>31</sup>

2. The wage relation becomes an intrinsically contradictory relation only with the advent of an evolving technology (as opposed to a static one, as was the case in previous societies). The rapid development of this technology prevents any permanent sedimentation of the modes of production (which might have served as the basis for a stabilization of class relations in the workplace). At the same time, it prevents technical knowledge from becoming crystallized forever in a specific category of the laboring population.

3. These factors take effect only in a particular overall sociopolitical and cultural environment. Capitalism can develop and fully assert itself only through a “bourgeois” democratic revolution or pseudorevolution. These revolutions, even though they do not engender the masses’ active participation, nevertheless liquidate previous social rules. They claim that the sole foundation for the organization of society is reason. They proclaim an equality of rights, the sovereignty of the people, etc. These characteristics appear even where the capitalist revolution and bureaucratic transformation have been telescoped into a single process (as, for instance, in China since 1949).

It is only this set of conditions, taken together, that gives to the class struggle under capitalism its peculiar and unique features. Indeed, the proletariat’s struggle:

a) Quickly encompasses all aspects of the organization of labor. Far from appearing as “natural” or “inherited,” production methods and modes of organization, which are constantly being revolutionized by the capitalists themselves, appear rather as what they in reality are: methods aimed at achieving the maximum of labor exploitation and at subordinating the laborer to capital to an ever-increasing extent.



b) Takes as its basis of support its adversary's internal contradictions. This adversary is constantly obliged to stir up trouble and then provide the proletariat with the arms it needs to fight.

c) Thereby becomes virtually a permanent struggle, both as a struggle over wages and as a fight over the pace of work and labor conditions.

d) Unlike that of slaves and serfs, is not reduced to having the "all or nothing" objective of a total reorganization of society. An incessant guerrilla war in the workplace educates proletarians and makes them aware of their solidarity. The success of partial struggles demonstrates to the workers, at lesser costs, that they can change their fate through their actions. As paradoxical as it may seem, it is because it is possible for the proletariat to undertake "reformist" actions that it becomes a revolutionary class.

e) Consequently, this struggle can affect the evolution of production, the economy, and ultimately the whole of society. And as it gains in importance and intensity, it really does have this effect. In having an effect upon wage rates, working-class struggle acts upon the level of demand as well as on the structure of production and on the pace of capitalist accumulation. By acting upon the pace of work and upon labor conditions, it obliges capitalism to pursue technological development in a clearly defined direction: the one that offers it the best opportunity of taming the workers' resistance. By struggling against unemployment, the proletariat obliges the capitalist state to intervene in order to stabilize economic activity and thereby to exert more control over such activity. The direct and indirect repercussions of this struggle leave no sphere of social life intact. Even the capitalists' vacation resorts were changed once the workers won vacation pay.

What, then, is the history and the dynamic of modern society? It is the history and dynamic of the development of capitalism. But the development of capitalism literally signifies the development of the proletariat. Capital produces the worker, and the worker produces capital—not only quantitatively, but *qualitatively*. The history of the society in which capitalism comes into being is first of all the history of the growing proletarianization of this society, of its being overrun by the proletariat. At the same time, it is the history of the struggle between capitalists and proletarians. The dialectic of this society is the dialectic of this struggle. With the development of capitalism, all other factors and mechanisms that might have played an important role in previous societies become peripheral and merely residual in relation to this central element.

*[The Real Dynamic of Capitalism]*

For traditional Marxism, the dynamic of capitalism is that of a quantitatively growing crisis, of ever more unbearable poverty, of ever more massive unemployment, of ever more colossal crises of overproduction. Contrary to appearances, this view in fact implies that there is no *history* of capitalism in the true sense of the term—no more than there is a "history" of a chemical mixture wherein chemical reactions growing at an increasingly accelerated pace finally blow up the laboratory itself. For in this way of conceiving things, the unfolding

of events is truly independent of the action of people and classes. Capitalists themselves do not act—they are “acted upon” by economic motives that determine them just as gravitation governs the movement of bodies. In fact, they have no hold over reality, which evolves independently of them according to the “laws of movement of capitalism.” They are merely the unconscious marionettes moved by these laws. It is out of the question for them to be able to put their regime in order so as to consolidate their power. It is unimaginable that they too might learn from historical experience how best to take care of their own interests.

In the traditional schema, even the workers “are acted upon” rather than themselves being actors. Their reactions are determined by this same automatic functioning of the movements of the economy. They are merely biologically conditioned by their poverty. The revolution is tied almost directly to their level of hunger. Class action can do almost nothing to influence the evolution of society so long as this society is not overthrown. Thus, even the results of the revolution are predetermined.

Nor can one see very well from this standpoint how the proletariat can *learn* anything throughout the course of this history, except that capitalism must be fought to the death. From their point of view, to know this society can only mean that they feel that it is the cause of their poverty. Nor can the conditions of proletarian life and work allow workers to understand how this society functions or why things happen to them. Only theoreticians can know such things, for only they have studied the laws of the expanding reproduction of capital and understood all about the falling rate of profit. If revolutionary consciousness exists anywhere, don’t look for it among the proletariat, our traditional Marxists would tell us if they were being completely consistent.

This problem of the relationship between the proletariat’s action and its consciousness has never been elucidated in classical Marxism. Lukács<sup>32</sup> attempted to resolve the problem (in *History and Class Consciousness*) but only obscured things further and underlined the contradictions within the classical conception. In the book’s main essay, proletarian consciousness is nothing outside of proletarian action; simply put, it *is* action. The proletariat incarnates the objective truth of history, for its action is such that it must transform this truth into its next necessary stage. But it carries out this transformation without really *knowing* what it is doing. Self-knowledge can come to it only through and after the revolution. This little sleight-of-hand trick whereby a mute object is transformed into an absolute subject comes straight out of Hegelianism. This is a sort of idealism, nay, even an absolute spiritualism that posits reason in the “things themselves” (and the proletariat is a thing under capitalism, since, for Lukács, the proletarian actually is reified, and capitalism has succeeded in transforming the worker into a thing). This reified reason is total and perfected—though it does not know itself, is not conscious of itself, and hence is *not a concrete historical subject*. Under such a conception, the “praxis of the proletariat” simply has taken the place of Hegel’s Absolute Spirit.

Lukács’s main essay was written at the height of the revolutionary Russian

and German upsurges in 1919. But a consciousness that is not a consciousness of itself cannot transform history. The proletariat did not seize power in Europe. Nor did it succeed in holding it in Russia. Another self-consciousness emerged and became sovereign: the Bolshevik party. Then, in September 1922, Lukács wrote his “Methodological Remarks on the Question of Organization” in which the Party appears as the working class’s consciousness in action. As always, spiritualism must end up by finding a concrete subject in which to incarnate a transcendent entity, for otherwise it would remain just what it is: a ghost. So God becomes the Catholic church, the Absolute Spirit animates the Prussian State bureaucracy, and the “praxis of the proletariat” becomes the practice of the Third International—already firmly in the hands of a Zinoviev.

As for us, the evolution of capitalism is a history in the strong sense of the term, namely, a process in which the actions of people and classes constantly and consciously<sup>33</sup> modify the very conditions under which this process unfolds. In the course of this process something *new* arises.

The evolution of capitalism is the history of the constitution and development of two classes of people in struggle, and in this struggle neither class can act without acting upon the other. It is the history of this struggle, and in the course of this struggle each of the adversaries is led to create weapons, means, forms of organization, and ideas, and to invent new responses to its situation as well as provisional goals. Such responses and objectives are in no way predetermined. Their consequences, whether intended or not, modify the overall framework of this struggle at each stage.

To constitute and develop itself, the capitalist class must accumulate capital. It must “rationalize” and concentrate production. To concentrate production merely signifies further “rationalization” on an ever-vaster scale. To accumulate means to transform labor into capital and to fit the lives and deaths of millions of people into the framework outlined by its factories and machinery. By doing so, capital accumulation thus comes to signify the creation of a constantly growing number of proletarians. And to “rationalize” within the framework of capitalism means to enslave living labor more and more to machinery and to those who manage production. It means to reduce those designated as executants more and more to the state of mere executants. The proletariat thereby finds itself constituted as an objective class *and* attacked by capitalism as soon as it is constituted. By fighting back against capitalism the proletariat, in the course of its history, *makes itself* into a class. We speak of “class” here in the full sense of the term, as a class *for itself*.

From then on the proletariat fights capitalism at every level affecting its existence. But this struggle takes place most clearly on the levels of *production*, the *economy*, and *politics*. The proletariat struggles against the capitalist “rationalization” of production, first against the machines themselves, and then against the increasing tempo of work. It fights against the “spontaneous” way in which the capitalist economy operates by demanding wage increases, shorter hours, and full employment. Quite soon it raises itself up to an overall conception of the

problem of society. It constitutes political organizations, attempts to modify the course of events, revolts, and tries to seize power.

In order to study fully the historical development and internal logic of each of these aspects of the proletariat's struggle and their underlying interconnections, we would have to fill volumes. This, of course, is not our intention here. We simply want to highlight what is the true *logic* of the history of capitalist society: the logic of the struggle among people and classes.

By struggle we do not in the least mean just massive and grandiose pitched battles. We can never insist too strongly on this point. This struggle is a permanent one. First and foremost, it takes place at the point of production. Figuratively speaking, half of each gesture made by a worker has as its objective to defend himself from exploitation and capitalist alienation. We can never insist too strongly that this *implicit, informal*, daily, and hidden struggle plays a formative role in history as important as that of great strikes and revolutions.<sup>34</sup>

As long as the class struggle lasts—and it will last as long as this society lasts—each action of one of the adversaries will elicit, immediately or in the long run, a parry from the other party. In its turn, this parry will give rise to a counterresponse and so on. But each of these actions alters the one who makes it as well as the one against whom it is directed; each class antagonist is changed by the action of the other. These actions bring about profound changes of the social setting, of the objective terrain on which the struggle unfolds. In their culminating moments, they give rise to a historical *creation*, the invention of new forms of organization, of struggle, or of life that in no way were contained in the previous state of affairs. Nor are they predetermined by the anterior situation. Finally, while this action is taking place, the two opposing classes constitute a new historical experience that, for the proletariat's part, brings them to an awareness of socialism.

Thus, on the level of *production*, capitalism's large-scale introduction of machinery in the first half of the nineteenth century<sup>35</sup> was rightly perceived by the workers as a frontal attack. They reacted by destroying the machines. On this level they soon were defeated. But in the factories, the struggle took on from the start an invincible form: the workers' resistance to production. Capitalism fought back with the widespread introduction of piecework. Wages based upon output then became the object of a bitter struggle: a fight over norms. Taylorism was capitalism's response to this struggle: From then on norms were to be established "scientifically" and "objectively." Further resistance on the workers' part made it clear that "scientific objectivity" in this field was a joke. Industrial psychology and then industrial sociology appeared on the scene in order to help "integrate" the workers into the workplace. On a practical level, these methods collapse under the weight of their own contradictions, but especially because the workers will not play along. It is precisely in the most advanced capitalist countries—the United States, England, and the Scandinavian countries—where the employers are increasingly applying these "modern" methods, and where the workers' wages are the highest, that daily conflict at the point of production reaches incredible proportions.

This is where we are today.<sup>36</sup> This schematic rendering of events, which

claims no more than to define the *type* of historical evolution that takes place between classes at the point of production, can be found in condensed form whenever one undertakes a concrete study of this struggle in an enterprise.<sup>37</sup>

Along with this series of attacks and counterattacks one can find in the evolution of capitalist production some well-known, large-scale constants that express capital's permanent tendency toward enslaving labor.

1. *The division of tasks* is carried out ever further and pushed to absurd lengths, not because it is the indispensable way of achieving productivity increases (beyond a certain point, it undoubtedly reduces productivity both directly and indirectly, through the enormous overhead costs it entails), but because it is the only means of subduing the recalcitrant worker. An ever greater division of tasks makes his work absolutely quantifiable and supervisable and turns him into a completely replaceable part.

2. *Mechanization* takes the following specific course: The worker must be made to be dominated by the machine (so that his output is determined by the machinery), and the entire course of the productive process must be automated to the greatest possible extent; i.e., it must be made to be independent of the producer.

The increasing division of tasks and mechanization in the capitalist mode obviously advance together in close interaction with one another. But at each stage they pass through, working-class resistance thwarts the capitalists' plans at least halfway.<sup>38</sup> This struggle has molded both the face of modern industry and its basic content: the way in which people live and work in factories. But it also has molded the modern economy and modern society as a whole.

The workers' struggle on the economic plane has been expressed above all through their wage demands. For quite a long time capitalism bitterly opposed such demands. Having almost lost the battle on this front, capitalism ended up instead adapting its economy. From the standpoint of demand, the key feature now is the steady increase of the mass of wages. These have become the basis for a constantly expanding market for consumer goods. *This* type of expanding economy, the one in which we live today, essentially is the product of the incessant pressure the working class has exerted on wages. And its main problems stem from this fact.

On the political plane, the workers' first attempts to organize usually were met with capitalist repression, either openly or in disguise. Rather quickly defeated on this level, capitalism, at the end of a long period of history, ended up turning these same working-class political organizations into the mainsprings of its continued operation. But even this has brought with it important modifications of the entire system: Capitalist "democracy" cannot function any longer without a large "reformist" party, and this party cannot be a mere puppet of the capitalist class (for in that case it would lose its electoral support and no longer would fulfill its function). Instead, it must be a potential "governmental" party. In fact, it has to be *in* government rather often.

Such a party even must taint the "conservative" party. In no country in the world can there be a question of wiping out reforms that had provoked bitter battles two decades ago, such as those fought over social security, unemploy-

ment insurance, progressive income taxes, or a policy of (relatively) “full employment.” For these and other reasons, capitalism has finally accepted the idea of State interference in economic affairs, after having for so long resisted any such interference as “revolutionary” and “socialistic.” In doing so, modern capitalism has sought to divert to its own ends the working class’s resistance to the spontaneous functioning of the economy. Through the intermediary of the State, it has instaurated a degree of control over the economy and over society that, in the final analysis, ends up serving its own interests.

We hardly need point out that these aspects that have been separated here for purposes of analysis are not so separated in reality. The effects of these actions are inextricably intertwined. To give just one example, we know that the political weight of the working class in modern societies prevents the State from allowing unemployment to develop beyond a relatively moderate point. This, however, creates a quite difficult problem for capitalists on the question of wages (because the negotiating position of the proletariat is strengthened by full employment), though they manage to maintain something like the status quo on the wage front.<sup>d</sup> Nevertheless, given a certain degree of “industrial strife,” this also creates in the factories an intolerable situation for the capitalists.<sup>39</sup> Each “solution” eventually discovered by the ruling class *always* uncorks new problems. The whole process merely expresses capitalism’s inability to overcome its basic contradiction. We will return to this later.

All the means used by capitalism obey the same injunction: Stay in a position of domination and extend supervisory control over society in general and over the proletariat in particular. Whatever might have been the initial influence of other factors—such as the struggle among capitalists themselves, or technical developments that had not yet been subordinated to capital—such influence gradually is now seeing its importance diminished in direct proportion to the proletarianization of society and to the extension of the class struggle.

In previous societies, spheres of social life other than those of production, economics, and politics were only indirectly and implicitly related to the class structure of society. They are now caught up in this conflict and explicitly integrated into the organizational network in which the ruling class tries to surround all of society. All sectors of human life must be put under the supervision of society’s leaders and managers. Capitalism makes use of all existing resources and means. Scientific knowledge is mobilized in its service. Psychology and psychoanalysis, industrial sociology and political economy, electronics and mathematics are all called on to contribute to the survival of the system, to fill in the breaches of its defenses, to help it to penetrate into the exploited class, to comprehend its motivations and behaviors, and to use these in the interests of “production,” “social stability,” and selling useless objects.

Thus modern societies, whether “democratic” or “dictatorial,” are in fact *totalitarian*, for in order to maintain their domination, the exploiters have to invade *all* fields of human activity and try to bring them to submission. It makes no difference that totalitarianism today no longer takes the extreme forms it once took under Hitler or Stalin or that it no longer utilizes terror as its sole and special means. Terror is only one of the means by which power can break down

the resilience of all opposition, and it is neither universally applicable nor necessarily the most profitable way of achieving its ends. "Peaceful" manipulation of the masses and the gradual assimilation of any organized opposition can be more effective.

#### *IV. Capitalist Politics, Yesterday and Today*

During the course of this century-old struggle, capitalism has been constantly transforming society. But it also is being profoundly modified itself. Let us begin our examination of these modifications on the most "ideological" of levels: that of capitalist politics.<sup>40</sup>

The capitalist class's politics is becoming more and more conscious and explicit today.<sup>41</sup> This can be best understood if we contrast it with the "capitalist politics of the nineteenth century." In the nineteenth century, *there was no capitalist politics* in the proper sense. We use this expression only for convenience's sake, understanding thereby the referential system, the idéés-forces, the range of means utilized, and, as we almost might say, the reflexes exhibited by the capitalist individual or the capitalists acting as a class through its institutions (parties, legislatures, State administrations, etc.) when dealing with the problems confronting them.

This capitalist "politics" of yesteryear is well known. It suffices to summarize its main points. Each capitalist ought to be left free to pursue his "enterprise" within (very wide-ranging) limits set down by law and "morality." In particular, the labor contract should be free and determined by the "agreement" of the parties. The State ought to guarantee social order, give profitable orders to various companies when possible, encourage the activities of capitalists through customs tariffs and trade agreements, conduct wars to "protect national interests," i.e., those of one or another group of capitalists. But it ought not to intervene directly in orienting or managing the economy, lest it "perturb" it. It should levy as little taxation as possible so as not to take too large a chunk of the national product, since its expenditures are "unproductive." Workers' demands are a priori unjustified since, concretely, they aim at lessening profits and, abstractly, they violate the laws of the market. Such demands ought therefore to be fought to the death—with the intervention of troops, if necessary—along with the instruments of the workers' struggle: strikes, unions, workers' parties, etc.

What is of importance here is not, of course, to discuss how absurd such an ideology is, how it mixes childish caprice and bad faith. Nor need we even go into how a large part of the capitalist class and its politicians (the "liberal-reactionary" wing, so to speak) today remains under its hold. What interests us is that, in corresponding to a certain phase in the development of the history of capitalism *and* of the labor movement, this politics has played a determining role in the unfolding of the class struggle. At one and the same time it nourished the capitalists' bitter resistance to workers' demands and conditioned both classical economic crises as well as the overall functioning of the economy. Indeed, "left to itself," the automatic functioning of the capitalist economy could only bring about recurrent overproduction crises. And "left to itself," the subsequent pro-

cess of trying to recover from these economic crises also could last for a long time.

What is remarkable is that the ideology of Marxism, while continually, violently, and correctly denouncing capitalist ideology and the “politics” that followed from it, shared its basic postulates in certain areas. Marxists too thought that nothing in the capitalist economy could be changed, that crises, being inevitable, were beyond the State’s control. The only difference was in the placement of the plus and minus signs. For Marxists, crises were the manifestation of the system’s insurmountable contradictions and could only grow worse.<sup>42</sup> Capitalists saw in them only “natural,” “necessary evils” that had their positive counterpart (elimination of less efficient enterprises) or that even were temporary signs of a “growing stage” of the system. *At bottom*, Marxists also thought that it was not possible to improve workers’ wages on an enduring basis, that their pay was doomed by the “laws of movement of capitalism” to fluctuate around an inalterable mean.<sup>43</sup> On these basic points about the nature of reality, Marxist politics and capitalist politics shared a similar outlook until around 1930.

On the other hand, Marxism identified the nineteenth-century manifestations of capitalism, and its politics during that era, as the *essence* of capitalism. As a system, capitalism appeared to Marxism to be characterized fundamentally by *anarchy* and *impotence*. “Laissez-faire” and so on was to Marxism merely the *absence* and *negation* of politics, though this politics was supposed to express the innermost tendencies of the system. Capitalist society necessarily was incapable of having a view or will of its own when it came to managing and organizing society. On the subjective level the system’s leaders and managers expressed this anarchy in the fact that they did not want (and could not want) to intervene—nor could they in fact intervene—in the market economy (and if they did intervene, they would have been impotent, of course, in the face of the inexorable economic laws of the market). And when these leaders do make decisions, they are, by their very nature, incapable of adopting a more general or more long-term point of view, riveted as they are to making a profit in the most narrow way possible. The being of the capitalist is this immediate being who is incapable of putting any distance whatsoever between himself and the reality around him, even if this might serve his own clearly perceived long-term interests. Only with great difficulty does he come to understand that the worker, like a machine, needs adequate lubrication. He would prefer to see his company demolished before granting a wage increase. He will always fight a war to win a colony or to avoid losing one. Briefly, the capitalist is incapable of either tactics or strategy, particularly in the case of the class struggle.

If, despite such impotence and anarchy, the system still functions, it is because, behind these capitalist marionettes, there sat in stern silence the impersonal and objective laws of the economy. These laws guaranteed both consistency and expansion, but only up to a certain point. For behind this consistency, we encounter once again, at a still further removed level, the ultimate anarchy of the system, its ultimate “objective” contradiction.

Let us say right away that, although historically outdated, this image *was* no



less *true*, in part. The excusable methodological “error” of the Marxists of yesterday was to elevate to the rank of eternal capitalistic traits the characteristics pertaining to one phase of its development. The real—and inexcusable—error of today’s “Marxists” is to look for the truth about the world surrounding them in hundred-year-old books.

It actually was true that for a long time capitalist politics was this absence of policy, this mixture of impotence and anarchy. It was true that the behavior of the individual capitalist (as well as of his politicians, his State, and his class) was precisely this short-sighted behavior that lacked all distance, perspective, tactics, and strategy. It is true that as long as he could, the capitalist treated the worker infinitely less well than a beast of burden and that his attitude was modified only as a result of class struggle and will remain changed only as long as this struggle continues. Finally, it is true that in this society that just “let things happen [*se laissait faire*],” the only consistent thing was the coherence afforded by economic laws. In a complex and rapidly changing world, however, these laws could only go hand in hand with a fundamental incoherence.

But things have changed. To preserve today this outdated image of capitalism is to commit the gravest—and most frequent—of errors one can commit in a war: to ignore one’s adversary and to underestimate his strength. This change was due not to some genetic mutations making capitalists more intelligent. The proletariat’s struggle has forced the ruling class to modify its politics, its ideology, its real way of organizing society. Capitalism has been objectively modified by this century-old struggle. But it also has been modified on a subjective level in the sense that its leaders and ideologists have accumulated, often against their will,<sup>44</sup> a historical *experience* of managing modern society.

The content of this new capitalist politics was forced upon the ruling classes by the struggle of the proletariat. Actual labor victories showed that the system really could accommodate itself quite well to certain reforms and even divert them for its own profit. Capitalism also began to use the ideas, methods, and institutions that arose out of the labor movement itself.

Thus, for instance, at a certain stage wage increases no longer can be combated as unstintingly as in the past, for pressure from the working class has become too strong. Little by little, however, capitalists discover that they *need not* be so opposed to these increases or resist them so absolutely. Indeed, from the moment the movement becomes a general one—and collective bargaining plays a big part in this process—no capitalist is put in an unfavorable position vis-à-vis his competitors just because he has granted a wage increase. And in the final analysis, the subsequent enlargement of demand helps him to make larger profits. Last and certainly not least, the capitalist makes up for these higher wages by increasing output and productivity, thus keeping the wages/profit ratio fairly constant. And in fact what he is trying to do is to buy the docility of the workers in the most important area, that of production, through his concessions on wages.<sup>45</sup> Of course, this is par excellence one of the cases where what is useful for, and what is done by, the class as a whole is not necessarily good for the individual capitalist. This is one of the reasons why this new attitude appears only when capital concentration, on the one hand, and the growth of labor organiza-

tions, on the other hand, have reached a certain crucial point. But from that moment on, a consciously applied policy of “moderate” wage hikes becomes an integral part of overall capitalist policy. For more and more capitalists come to see the connection between such increases and overall market expansion.

Let us take another example. The working class today would not tolerate for a minute a repetition of the depression of 1929-33. Having experienced this great crisis, the ruling class clearly realizes that relatively “full employment” must be maintained. At the same time that the capitalists finally became aware of the obvious connection between the maintenance of full employment and accelerated capital expansion they discovered—along with the workers, or even before them—that statism in no way meant the same thing as socialism. Similarly, the unions they had fought against for so long are finally recognized and ultimately transformed into cogs in the system.<sup>46</sup>

We now arrive at the contemporary conception of capitalism, at the policies that are now actually being put in force even while they still are being fought in words. The key change is in the abandonment of “laissez-faire” and, more profoundly, the repudiation of the ideology of “free enterprise” and of the belief that the spontaneous functioning of the economy and of society will produce the optimum result for the ruling class. This also entails an acceptance of the idea (which comes out of the labor movement) that society—i.e., the ruling class—bears an overall responsibility for what happens in society and that the State plays a central role in exercising this responsibility.

At the same time, the ruling class accepts the idea that, through its various organs, it must achieve the most extensive *control* possible over all spheres of social activity. State intervention in social affairs becomes the *rule* and no longer the exception, as used to be the case. Its content is now radically different than it was under the classical capitalist ideology. The State no longer is supposed to guarantee merely a social order within which the play of capitalist forces would freely proceed. It is now explicitly charged with assuring full employment and “economic growth with stability”<sup>47</sup>—which means assuring an adequate level of overall demand and intervening to prevent wage pressures from becoming too strong. It must keep an eye on the composition and skill development of the labor force. It must help sectors where private capital investment is insufficient or insufficiently rational. It must encourage scientific and cultural development. Henceforth the *idées-forces* are expansion, development of consumption and leisure, the enlargement of the educational sphere, and the promotion of culture. The means include organization, individual selection, and hierarchization.

There is no point in stressing now the class content of these objectives and means, or the contradictions inherent in this new capitalist policy. Doubts on this score—and an obstinate refusal to recognize the reality of contemporary capitalism—can remain only among those who feel the earth slipping out from under their feet every time they see the “standard of living,” for example, rise under capitalism. They become so disoriented because they continue to confuse socialism with the expansion of *this kind* of production and of *this kind* of consumption, with the enlargement of *this kind* of education and with the promotion of *this kind* of culture.

Subjectively, these new policies are the product of the capitalists' experiences of the class struggle and of managing society. Objectively, and at the same time, they are the corollary of the real transformations capitalism has undergone. They are the explicit logic of capitalism's new structure and of the tools it has put into service to assure its continued domination over society. Because it must provide the means to achieve these ends, it also accelerates the development of these new structures and makes ever-wider use of these tools. Let us now turn to this aspect of the evolution of capitalism.

### *V. The Bureaucratization of Capitalism and Its Ideal Tendency*

The result of two centuries of class struggle has been the profound, objective transformation of capitalism. This transformation can be summed up in one word: bureaucratization. By bureaucratization we mean a type of social structure in which the direction of collective activities is in the hands of an impersonal, hierarchically organized apparatus. This apparatus is supposed to act according to "rational" criteria and methods. It is economically privileged, and it gains recruits according to rules it actually proclaims and really applies.

The bureaucratization of capitalism has three main sources that are rooted in the class struggle and in capitalism's own attempts to subject people to its authority and to control their social activities.

1. In *production*. The concentration and "rationalization" of production give rise to a bureaucratic apparatus within the capitalist enterprise. The function of this apparatus is to manage production and regulate the enterprise's relations with the rest of the economy. In particular, the direction of the labor process implies the existence of such a specialized, well-staffed apparatus. Among its tasks are the definition of individual jobs, of the work pace, and of production methods; control over the quantity and quality of what is produced; supervision; planning the production process; managing people and "integrating" them into the firm's operation (the carrot-and-stick approach).

The workers' resistance to capitalist production requires that capitalism exercise an ever-stricter degree of control over the labor process and over the activity of each worker. Such supervisory control, in turn, requires a complete transformation of the firm's nineteenth-century managerial methods and creates a managerial apparatus that tends to become the real locus of power in the enterprise.<sup>48</sup>

2. In the *State*. The State has always been the bureaucratic apparatus par excellence. But it now has become an instrument for controlling and even managing economic and social life in a growing number of sectors. This profound transformation of the State's role is accompanied by an extraordinary growth both in terms of personnel and in terms of the functions they fulfill.

3. In *political and trade-union organizations*. Here the evolution of capitalism begins to overlap with the evolution proper to the labor movement. Starting at a certain stage in its development and for a number of complex reasons, the labor movement also becomes bureaucratized.<sup>49</sup> As this occurs, the objective function of large "working-class" organizations changes and becomes one of maintaining

the proletariat within the system of exploitation, of channeling its struggle toward merely refurbishing, rather than destroying, this system.<sup>50</sup> The regimentation of the proletariat—and more generally, of the entire population—into the framework of bureaucratic capitalism, its manipulation, and the management of its political activities and economic demands require a specialized apparatus, one personified by the “working class’s” political and trade-union bureaucracy. The same factors—and also the need to struggle against bureaucratized “working-class” organizations—induce the bureaucratization of conservative political groups as well.

At a certain stage, bureaucratization (i.e., the management of activity by hierarchized apparatuses) becomes the very logic of this society, its response to everything.

In its present stage, bureaucratization has extended far beyond the spheres of production, the economy, the State, and politics. Consumption is bureaucratized now in the sense that neither its volume nor its patterns are left to the spontaneous mechanisms of the economy or to the psychology of the consumer (“free choice,” of course, never existed in an alienated society). Consumption has become the object of an ever more refined and intensive practice of manipulation. This activity too requires a corresponding specialized apparatus of sales services, advertising, market research, etc.

Even leisure is becoming bureaucratized.<sup>51</sup> An increasing degree of bureaucratization in the world of culture is inevitable in the present context. Even if the “production” of culture has not become an organized, collective activity, its promotion and propagation have become so to an immense degree (the press, publishing, radio, cinema, television, etc.). Scientific research itself has become caught up in the process, and now goes on at a terrifying rate, whether it takes place under the supervision of large corporations or the State.<sup>52</sup>

Such an analysis of our society raises new problems at every level. We cannot even broach these questions here.<sup>53</sup> Before doing anything else, however, we must sift out the *meaning* of the present evolution of capitalism. We must see how this evolution affects the fate of people in this society down to its deepest roots.

### *[The Real Meaning of Bureaucratization]*

For over a century, the vast majority of Marxists saw in capitalism a “profit system.” They criticized it essentially because such a system condemned workers to poverty (*qua* consumers) and because it corrupted social relations by money. Indeed, only the most vulgar and superficial aspects of this corruption were examined. The idea that capitalism is above all an enterprise that dehumanized the worker and destroyed work as a signifying activity (we take “signifying” here to mean “creative of significations”)—an idea, moreover, first formulated by Marx himself—would have appeared, if they had thought of it at all, as some foggy philosophizing that they readily would have described as spiritualistic.

Today an equally superficial view of the process of bureaucratization seems to be overrunning the world. Some see in bureaucratization only the advent of a

managerial stratum that has grafted itself onto the private employing class, or perhaps even replaced them. For them bureaucratization has instaurated an unacceptable type of command in production and in political life, thereby intensifying the revolt of the executives and creating a new and immense amount of waste. All this is both true and important. But one is doomed to understanding nothing about contemporary society if one stops at this point.

Bureaucratization does not signify merely the emergence of a social stratum whose weight and importance are constantly growing. Nor does it simply mean that the functioning of the economy undergoes basic modifications through concentration and statification. Bureaucratization entails a transformation of the values and significations that form the basis of people's lives in society. It remodels their attitudes and their conduct. If this aspect, the profoundest one of all, is not understood, nothing has been understood about the *cohesiveness* of present-day society, or about the *crisis* it is undergoing.

Capitalism imposes its "logic" on all of society. The ultimate end of human activity and human existence in this "logic" is maximum production. Everything is to be subordinated to this arbitrary end. Capitalist "rationalization" seeks to achieve this end through methods that both derive from people's alienation as producers—since people are now seen merely as means to the end of increasing production—and recreate this alienation while constantly exacerbating it. In concrete terms, it is accomplished through the ever-heightened separation of direction and execution, by reducing workers to the status of mere executives, and by transferring the functions of management *outside* the labor process.

Capitalist "rationalization" is therefore inseparable from bureaucratization,<sup>54</sup> since it can proceed only to the extent that it also constitutes itself as a body of "rationalizers," i.e., managers, organizers, middle-level staff, quality controllers, "setup men" who prepare the work of others in the production process, etc. But this "rationalization," imposed from without and maintained within an exploitative framework, entails the *destruction of the significations* of social activities just as externalized "organization" entails the *destruction of people's responsibility and initiative*.

It is easy to see this on the plane of *work*, which is the most familiar and where the consequences of this process of bureaucratization (or "rationalization") have been known for a long time. Capitalism has destroyed work as a *signifying* activity, as an activity in the course of which significations are constituted for the subject and to which this subject is attached precisely for this reason. All signification has been destroyed *within* work, since in jobs that have become compartmentalized there no longer is an *object* of labor properly speaking (but simply fragments of matter whose meaning always exists elsewhere). Nor is there any longer a *subject* of work, the person of the worker having been broken up into separate skills and abilities of which certain ones have been arbitrarily extracted from the whole and intensively applied in isolation. At the same time, capitalism destroys all possibility for the worker to attach any signification to work as such, since the worker is not present in the production process as a per-

son but simply as an anonymous and replaceable faculty: the faculty of indefinite repetition of one or another elementary gesture.

From the point of view of production itself, the fragmentation of the labor process, and in particular the fragmentation of its object, creates practically insurmountable problems that we have analyzed elsewhere.<sup>55</sup> Briefly speaking, the growing division of labor and of tasks requires that a unified conception of the labor process, which does not exist in the subjects who carry out the work, must exist elsewhere—otherwise production would collapse under the weight of its own internal differentiation. This “elsewhere” is to be found in the separate managerial apparatus existing outside the production process, in other words, in the company bureaucracy, whose function it is to reconstitute the unity of this process on an ideal level. The meaning of work must be sought among those who do not “work”: office [*bureau*] personnel. But in applying its own methods, the bureaucracy itself proliferates and thus subdivides itself. It internally divides both its work and its tasks in such a way that it becomes just as difficult to restore a unified conception of productive operations in the offices as it is in the workshops. At the limit, the signification of these operations is possessed by *no one*.

The signification of work as such thus may be destroyed, but for the workers there remains the signification of work—and of the daily struggles against exploitation that accompany it—as a *terrain of positive socialization*, as a framework within which the workers’ solidarity and their existence as a collectivity are constituted. Though both fragmented and fragmenting, the workplace remains for the worker the place of community with other people, and, in the first place, a community of struggle. We will dwell at length on this point later. What is crucial now is the simultaneously conscious and objective logic of the process of bureaucratization. Bureaucratic logic not only does not understand this aspect of life in the enterprise, it fights it with all the means it has at its disposal, sensing correctly that it is directed against it. In a thousand different ways the bureaucracy is constantly trying to destroy the solidarity and positive socialization of the workers, mainly by attempting to introduce an unending number of differentiations within the working class, giving different “statuses” to different jobs, and arranging them according to a hierarchical structure. That this attempt is artificial and that it constantly fails to achieve the ends at which it aims matters little in the present context, for it defines the *meaning* of the bureaucratic enterprise, which is the destruction of all meaning in work. Work, in the bureaucratic-capitalist outlook, should have only a single, unique signification for the subject: to be a source of income, the condition for obtaining wages.

Bureaucratic organization entails another, equally important consequence: *the destruction of responsibility*. From the formal point of view, bureaucratic organization signifies a division of responsibilities: Areas of authority or supervision must be clearly defined and circumscribed while responsibilities are accordingly fragmented. This ever-heightened fragmentation of these areas is an expression of the growing division of labor within the bureaucracy itself. Ultimately it leads to a total destruction of responsibility.

First of all, the organization of labor from the outside and the reduction of

the overwhelming mass of workers to more and more limited tasks of execution signify in fact that all responsibility has been taken away from them. The organization of their activities by a limited and clearly defined number of "persons in positions of responsibility" (and this goes for all activities, not just in production) signifies that everyone is reduced to a "couldn't care less attitude." At first this includes everyone except the "organizers." But eventually these "organizers" themselves lose all sense of responsibility as well, since the collectivization of bureaucratic apparatuses and the progressive division of labor within their ranks create new bureaucrats: the bureaucrats of the bureaucracy.

Further, as in the division of tasks, the growing fragmentation of all areas of authority and responsibility also creates an enormous problem of *synthesis* that the bureaucracy is incapable of resolving in a rational manner. To be more precise, it can only respond to this problem by applying its own methods, by creating a new category of bureaucrats. These we may call the "synthesis specialists" whose function it is to bring about a reunification of what has been torn asunder—though of course their mere existence already signifies that things have splintered apart once more. Since defining areas of authority and domains of partial responsibility can never be done exhaustively or made watertight, the bureaucracy will never be able to settle within itself such questions as: Where do A's responsibilities leave off and where do B's begin? Where do those of their superior begin? Its attempts to settle such questions only risk setting off domestic intrigues and struggles among cliques and clans.

Finally, the most deep-seated motivations for an attitude of responsibility disappear. Work has become merely a source of income, and therefore the only thing that counts is simply to "cover oneself" with respect to the formal rules and regulations.

For the same reasons, *initiative* tends to disappear. By its logic and through its actual operation, the system denies all initiative to executants and tries to transfer it to managers and leaders. But since everyone is gradually becoming transformed into an executant on one level or another, this transfer of responsibility ends up signifying that initiative disintegrates in the hands of the bureaucracy at the same rate that it becomes concentrated there.

Using the production process as our starting point, we have provided a description of this situation. Bureaucratization becomes a more and more general phenomenon as it takes over other spheres of social life. The disappearance of meaningful activity, responsibility, and initiative becomes to an increasing degree the main characteristic of a bureaucratized society.

### *[Motives in Bureaucratic Society]*

How then can this society assure its own cohesion? What holds its various parts together? And, above all, what, under normal conditions, guarantees the subordination of those whom it exploits and ensures that their conduct conforms to the functional needs of the system?

Certainly, in part at least, it is violence and coercion. The system is always ready to intervene in order to guarantee social order. But, for obvious reasons,

violence and coercion do not suffice and never have sufficed to assure the continued functioning of the system, except perhaps on galleys. Keeping all of people's gestures in line and in unison is a twenty-four-hour job. One way or another, this society must be kept moving—in *its* direction. People must consume the products that are supplied to them. They must go to the vacation spots and entertainment areas picked out for them. They must procreate the children who will be needed tomorrow and then raise them in a fashion that conforms to social norms. And so on. Whatever its contradictions and conflicts, a society can continue only if it succeeds in inculcating its members with *adequate motivations*, thus inducing them to reproduce again and again consistent behaviors both among themselves and in relation to the structure and operation of the overall social system.

It matters little that these motivations might be or appear to us as false or mystified, provided they exist and society succeeds in reproducing them within each new generation. The nonexistence of God, the internal contradictions of Catholic dogma, and the contradictions between this dogma and the Church's social practice did not prevent the Christian serfs of Western Europe from behaving for centuries as if they recognized the values of the feudal order (*even if, in extreme moments, they burned down the lord's castle*).

But adequate motivations (again, we are speaking of motivations other than those resulting from mere direct or indirect coercion) cannot exist unless a *system of values* is imposed upon society. All its members must participate in and share this system of values to a greater or lesser degree. Two centuries of capitalism, and particularly the last half-century, have resulted in the collapse of the traditional system of values (religion, family, etc.) and in a pathetic attempt to substitute "rational," modern ones in their stead. (It suffices to recall the unending platitudes of the new "lay and republican" morality in France, of which the racketeers of the Radical Socialist party were the most noteworthy exponents.) This collapse of traditional values indeed has gone along with another product of the evolution of capitalism: the dislocation of organic and integrated human communities. These communities alone can serve as the soil nourishing values in which the members of society actually participate. (Here again, the factory and the working-class community that makes it up are radically opposed to this tendency of capitalism, but this point, as important as it is, is outside the context of the present analysis.)

What then can society's response to the problem of motivating people be? How can one get them to do what is asked of them? We have already seen this response when we discussed the problem of the signification of work: The only possible remaining motivation is *to have an income*. One might add another: In a more and more hierarchized and bureaucratized structure, there is also the motivation of *getting a promotion*. But, despite the constant attempt to attach differences in status to the various rungs of the bureaucratic ladder, a host of factors prevents these from acquiring a decisive importance in the context of the twentieth century. Ultimately, promotion is important because it represents an increase in pay.

But what is the signification of income? In a society where capital is becoming



more and more impersonal, private income no longer can lead to accumulation, except in the rarest of circumstances. Income therefore only has meaning through the *consumption* it allows. But what is this consumption? Traditional needs or (for the moment, what boils down to the same thing) the traditional methods of satisfying these needs are at the point of saturation, due to constant rises in income. Consumption therefore can preserve a semblance of meaning only if new needs or new methods of satisfying needs are constantly being created—which at the same time is indispensable for keeping the economy in a state of constant expansion.

Here bureaucratization intervenes anew. Work has lost all meaning, save as a source of income. This “income” has a meaning insofar as it allows individuals to consume, in other words, to satisfy needs. But this consumption itself loses its initial meaning. Needs no longer are—or at least are to a lesser and lesser degree—the expression of an organic relation of the individual with his natural and social milieu. They have become the object of underhanded or even violent *manipulation*. At the limit, they are created out of thin air by a special section of the bureaucracy: the consumption, advertising, and sales bureaucracy. Whether you “really need” some object or another matters little. Indeed, as any half-awake sociologist will tell you, these words have no meaning at all. It suffices that you imagine that something is either indispensable or useful, that it exists and that others have it, that “it is done,” or that “it is being worn,” etc. “Well-being,” “the standard of living,” and “social enrichment” evidently have become concepts floating in midair. In what sense can it be said that one society, which devotes an increasing portion of its activities to creating out of thin air an awareness among its members that they “lack” something so that they can exhaust themselves working full-speed to try to gratify this new need, “is richer” or “lives better” than another society that does not create such an awareness?

What is of greater importance here, even private life or consumption—which seemed like it might have remained an area where individuals could give their own meaning [*façonnet la signification*] to their existence—does not escape the process of “rationalization” and bureaucratization. The consumer’s spontaneous or cultural attitudes are an absolutely inadequate basis for generating demand within the colossal system of modern production. The consumer must be led to behave in a fashion that conforms with the exigencies of society. He must consume an ever-growing quantity of what the production lines turn out. His conduct and his motivations therefore must become subject to calculation and manipulation. And this manipulation henceforth becomes an integral part of the process of “organizing society.” It obviously is the result of the destruction of significations—but it immediately becomes their cause and completes this process of destruction.

We can see the same process at work in politics. Present-day political organizations (*whatever* their orientation) are bureaucratized and separate from the population. As such, they no longer express a political attitude or will of any large stratum of society. No population group provides them any substance. No one actually *participates* in them, for none of these organizations is capable of serving

as the vehicle of collective political creation (whether this creation might be revolutionary, reformist, or conservative *matters little*).

How then can one guarantee the public's "obedience" to these organizations? Certainly in part it comes from a series of automatic reflexes already incorporated in society. But to an increasing extent, it must be produced by a conscious and continual effort on the part of the bureaucratic "general staffs" of these parties, making use of specialized services and departments. Let us merely reflect on the following fact: There have been twenty-five centuries of recorded political history in the Western world—but *propaganda* is basically a creation of the last half-century.

In the past people would join a political party of their own accord or support a politician whom they thought would express their views. No one attempted to "create political interest" in the population. Today this interest is lacking, despite (and because of) the desperate and permanent efforts of organizations to create it. Propaganda no longer is anything but mystificatory manipulation. The content has disappeared. What counts for the electors is the "image" a party or a particular candidate projects. Today a president is "sold" to the population of the United States as one sells a brand of toothpaste. Obviously this is not just a one-way process. Those who manipulate are also, in a certain fashion, manipulated by those whom they manipulate. But the wheel always remains in the same rut. Here again the process is the same: The meaning of politics is dead. But as society requires a minimum of political behavior from its subjects, a political bureaucracy emerges and manipulates citizens in order to ensure it.

As far as people's fate in society is concerned, what is the most profound content of the process of bureaucratization? It is the insertion of each individual into a little niche of the great productive system where he is compelled to perform an alienated and alienating job. It is the destruction of the meaning of work and of all of collective life. It is the reduction of life to private life outside of work and outside of all collective activity. It is the reduction of private life to material consumption. It is alienation in the domain of consumption itself through the permanent manipulation of the individual *qua* consumer.

This content, combined as it is with the readily familiar traits of the process of bureaucratization in the areas of production, the economy, and politics, allows us to grasp the *ideal tendency of bureaucratic capitalism*. We shall now try to give a more precise account of this tendency by defining what can be called the *model* of a bureaucratic society. For it is only in terms of this model that the evolution of contemporary societies can be fully understood.

### [*The Bureaucratic Model*]

A bureaucratic society is one that has succeeded in transforming the overwhelming majority of the population into wage earners. Only marginal strata of the population (5 percent farmers, 1 percent artists, intellectuals, and prostitutes) remain outside the wage relation (with its concomitant hierarchy). It is a society wherein:

- a) The population is integrated into huge impersonal production units

(owned by an individual, an anonymous corporation, or the State) and is arrayed along a hierarchical pyramidal structure. Only to a very minor degree does this structure correspond to differences in knowledge, abilities, etc. (These differences themselves are the product of education and hence of differences in income. They consequently tend to be reproduced from generation to generation.) For the most part, this structure corresponds to the instauration of technically and economically arbitrary differentiations. These arbitrary differentiations are nevertheless necessary from the exploiters' point of view.

b) Work has lost all signification of its own, even for the majority of "skilled" personnel. It retains meaning only as a source of income and as a condition for obtaining such. The division of labor is pushed to absurd lengths. Even if it has attained a certain limit, the division of tasks has reached the point where only fragmentary tasks remain, themselves stripped of all meaning.

c) "Full employment" has been realized on a nearly permanent basis. Provided they "conform," wage earners, whether manual or intellectual workers, enjoy almost complete job security. Apart from minor fluctuations, production advances in good years and bad by a significant percentage.

d) In good and bad years, wages increase by a percentage that does not differ appreciably from production increases. Consequently, in growing, production creates its own outlets as far as buying power is concerned.

e) "Needs," in the economic or rather the commercial and advertising sense of the term, regularly increase with buying power. Society creates a sufficient amount of "needs" to sustain the demand for the goods it produces, whether created directly through advertising and consumer manipulation or indirectly through the process of social differentiation, where lower income groups are constantly being offered more expensive models of consumption.

f) Job hierarchization in enterprises has reached the point that the solidarity of large groups of exploited workers has been broken to a substantial degree. The system, in other words, is "open" and "flexible" enough to create non-negligible opportunities for promotion (say, for example, a 1 in 10 chance) for the upper half of the wage-earning class. Consequently, in a majority of cases, relationships between workers in the workplace no longer are modeled on the workshop of today, but on the office of yesterday (underhanded competition, intrigues, and bootlicking).

g) Consequently, the enterprise not only is an abhorrent place to work but also ceases, in the majority of instances, to be a place of positive socialization.

h) Changes in city life and housing tend to annihilate local community life as the framework for socialization and the physical basis for supporting an organic collectivity. This comes about as a result of the continued differentiation of places for sharing activities. Integrated community life in urban centers is completely dislocated. Previously, such collective communities were ridden with contradictions and strife. Now they cease to exist as collectivities. They are no more than the juxtaposition of individuals and families each living on its own and coexisting in the mode of anonymity.

i) Consequently, whether at work or where he lives, the individual finds him-

self confronted by surroundings that are either positively hostile or anonymously populated by unknown masses of people.

j) The only remaining motivation is the race after the carrot of an “ever-higher standard of living” (not to be confused with real living, which does not go by standards). This “rising standard of living,” which bears within itself its own negation (since there is always another, even higher standard to be attained), works like a treadmill.

k) Social life as a whole keeps up its “democratic” facade and continues to include political parties, trade unions, and so on. But these organizations, as well as the State, politics, and public life in general, have become profoundly bureaucratized (though this process of bureaucratization, of course, is not an exact replica of the one that has transformed the sphere of production).

l) Consequently, the individual’s active participation in “politics” or in the life of political and trade-union organizations has, objectively speaking, *no meaning*. Nobody can do anything at all, let alone be able to struggle against the existing state of things. And people actually see that such participation is meaningless. At the very most, a small minority remains mystified in this respect and maintains ties between these organizations and the population at large. But the population at large has no interest in politics, except perhaps in an opportunistic and cynical fashion when “elections” come up.

m) Not only politics and its corresponding political organizations, but *all* organizations and *all* collective activities have been both bureaucratized and given up for dead by people in this society. As someone once put it, “Even among bowlers, there are still some people who bowl but there is no one to elect officers, discuss questions of importance to bowlers, etc.” Hence *privatization* characterizes people’s general attitude toward life—though, of course, privatization does not mean the absence of society; it means a peculiar mode of social living.

n) Consequently, *social irresponsibility* becomes an essential trait of human behavior. Irresponsibility is possible for the first time on such a scale because society no longer has any challenges before it, either internally or externally. Its productive capacities and tremendous wealth confer upon it broad margins of irresponsibility unimaginable in any other period of history. Society is allowed to make almost any mistake. It can indulge in almost any sort of irrationality. It can produce almost any sort of waste. Its own alienation and inertia prevent it from giving itself any new tasks or asking itself any new questions. For this reason it encounters no crucial problems that might put to the test its basic inability to make an explicit choice, even an irrational one. Indeed, nothing helps it to imagine that it might someday have to act on such a choice.

o) Art and culture actually have become nothing but objects of consumption and pleasure. They no longer have any connection with human or social problems. Formalism predominates and the Universal Museum becomes the supreme manifestation of contemporary culture.

p) Society’s philosophy becomes consumption for the sake of consumption in private life and organization for the sake of organization in collective life.

This air-conditioned nightmare already surrounds us. The preceding descrip-

tion can hardly be considered an extrapolation of contemporary reality. It gives expression to the objective path bureaucratized society is following at an ever-increasing speed. It provides a definition of the ruling class's ultimate goal, which is to defeat the revolt of the exploited by harnessing them to the race for a higher "standard of living," by breaking up their solidarity through increased hierarchization and by bureaucratizing every type of collective endeavor. Conscious or not, this is the *bureaucratic-capitalist project*. This is the practical meaning that ties together the policies of the ruling classes and the objective processes at work in their society.

But this project runs aground, for it does not succeed in overcoming the fundamental contradiction of capitalism. On the contrary, it multiplies this contradiction to infinity. Nor has it yet succeeded in suppressing people's struggle against this system or in transforming them into marionettes manipulated by the bureaucracies installed in the sectors of production, consumption, and politics. It is toward the analysis of the conditions for and the signification of this failure that we now wish to turn our attention.

### [MCR III]

#### VI. *The Failure of Capitalism*

Capitalism tries to completely bureaucratize society. Whether they know it or not, whether they explicitly wish to or not, capitalists can neither counter the workers' struggle against the system nor resolve the innumerable problems the evolution of the modern world constantly raises for them, except by trying to subject to their authority and to their "organizing methods" a greater and greater number of sectors of social life. Capitalists must try to penetrate further and further into people's work life and social life in order to direct these areas according to their own interests and outlook.

In the current way of looking at things, one sees only the development of production in the development of capitalism. But this is only the *result* of the extension and the deepening of capitalist *relations* of production and life. The development of capitalism means the increasing proletarianization of society; the reduction of all work to tasks of execution carried out within large, bureaucratically organized units, and the ever-heightened separation of functions of execution from functions of direction; the external manipulation and organization of all aspects of life; the constitution of separate managerial apparatuses, within which the same division between direction and execution is rapidly put in force.

This is the way capitalism organizes itself and society. It aims at producing a situation where the managerial apparatus would decide everything, where nothing would interrupt the "normal" functioning of operations as foreseen by bureaucratic offices and governments; where everything would unfold according to the plans of the organizers; where the limitless manipulation of people would bring them to behave docilely like production and consumption machines. In this way, the contradictions and crises of the system finally would be overcome.

To all appearances, capitalism already has taken a good number of steps down this road. As we have seen in the first part of this text,<sup>56</sup> it has succeeded in getting enough control over the economy to eliminate depressions and massive unemployment, in manipulating consumers so that they absorb a constantly growing volume of production, in integrating labor organizations into its system and making them cogs in that system, and, finally, in transforming politics into a harmless little game.

Apologists for the system and a few traditional Marxists consider these manifestations of the bureaucratization of society, and in particular the phenomenon of attaining adequate control over the economy, as proving that capitalism has “overcome its contradictions.” Traditional Marxists do not see that capitalism has merely eliminated from its social environment what *was not* capitalistic in it. What they are accustomed to thinking of as “contradictions” are precisely *not* the contradictions of capitalism, but the incoherencies of a society that has not yet been sufficiently transformed by capitalism and adequately assimilated to it.

Failure to recognize these phenomena often leads these traditional Marxists either to deny the facts or abandon the revolutionary perspective. They do not understand, for example, that economic depressions were a condition of the still-fragmentary character of production, divided as it was among a host of independently managed units. This fragmentation has nothing essentially capitalistic about it. From the point of view of the system itself, such an arrangement is just as absurd as the independent management of various workshops in a large factory would be. The logic of capitalism is to treat the whole of society as one immense, integrated enterprise. Far from revealing the essence of the system, the problems it encounters as long as this integration has not been fully realized serve only to mask it.

Once we rid ourselves of this superficial outlook on the evolution of capitalism, however, we see immediately that the contradiction found in capitalism cannot be suppressed unless the system itself is abolished. For this contradiction, as we saw in section III (“The Fundamental Contradiction of Capitalism”), is set up by the very structure of the system. It is inherent in the fundamental relation that constitutes the capitalist organization of production and of work. In the capitalist method of organizing these areas, the system is constantly trying to reduce just about every worker into a pure and simple executant. But this system would collapse as soon as workers were completely reduced to such a status. It therefore is obliged simultaneously to solicit the participation of the executants in the labor process *and* to forbid them from showing any initiative. In a society in a state of continual upheaval, this contradiction becomes *the* daily problem of the production process. And the workers’ class struggle becomes immediately a permanent challenge to the foundations of the system.

Now, the development of capitalism is nothing but the extension of capitalist relations to all of society. In bureaucratizing all activities as a way of “resolving” the contradictions inherited from previous historical eras, capitalism merely spreads *its* fundamental contradiction everywhere. And its attempts to resolve it merely end in failure.

To convince ourselves of this, let us first consider the situation in the sphere

of production. For a century, Taylorism, industrial psychology, and then industrial sociology have tried to square this particular circle. They have tried to make alienated and exploited workers work as if they were not alienated and exploited. They have tried to get those who are forbidden all initiative to take extraordinary measures "when it is necessary" (i.e., all the time). They have tried to convince those who have been systematically excluded to participate in something. The solution to this problem has not advanced one inch for over a century.<sup>57</sup> The vain attempts of industrial sociologists to "reform human relations in industry" ultimately served only as window dressing, rather like the well-tended flower beds that surround modern factories.

When the logic of the system, pushed to its ultimate limits, reaches some absolute impasse, corrections are made. But these corrections are only oscillations around a central point of disequilibrium. Thus, there is now a trend away from the ever-increasing division of tasks. It has been seen that beyond a certain point this division lessens the enterprise's overall output rather than increases it.<sup>58</sup> Modern companies in England and the United States are beginning to abandon piecework and go back to hourly wage rates in order to eliminate the conflicts that perpetually arise over the setting of norms, quality control, etc.

Ultimately, such corrections correct nothing at all. It is impossible within the present context to enlarge the scope of tasks to the point where a worker's job would recover a semblance of meaning. And if one were to bring about a restitution of what is involved with the performance of tasks through an augmentation of their relative degree of autonomy in the work process to the point where they would be more integrated to the activity of the workers, that would just multiply their means of struggle against management, thus feeding the fundamental conflict anew. The return to hourly pay, on the other hand, revives the whole problem of output (unless, of course, the firm is content with receiving an amount of output set by the workers themselves).

The solution capitalism has chosen is not merely to refurbish its relations with the workers but to seek the radical abolition of its labor relation problems by abolishing the worker, in other words, through automating production. As an American employer profoundly remarked, "The biggest trouble in industry is that it is full of human beings."<sup>59</sup> But this suppression of the worker can never be totally achieved. Automated units cannot operate without being surrounded by a network of human activities (supply, supervision, maintenance, and repair). They imply therefore the maintenance of a work force and the resulting contradictions, even if they take on a new form. And in any case, for a long time yet to come, automation, by its very nature, will affect only a minority of the work force. Workers actually or virtually eliminated from automated production sectors must find a job somewhere—and it can only be in nonautomated sectors. Automated sectors hardly ever employ unskilled workers, so the great majority of these workers will continue for a long time to come to be employed in these other sectors. Automation therefore does not resolve capitalism's problem in production.

Thus capitalism's victories over the workers are transformed after a time into failures.<sup>60</sup> The same dialectic appears to be at work when the management of so-

ciety as a whole is considered. Each "solution" capitalism invents to take care of its problems only creates new ones, and just as fast; each of its "victories" brings with it its opposite.

Let us take the problem of depressions and unemployment. Postwar capitalism succeeded in getting a handle on the level of economic activity so as to eliminate economic depressions and maintain relatively full employment of the work force. But this situation gives birth to a host of new problems, as can be seen very clearly in the case of England.

In England, the unemployment rate has never surpassed 2.5 percent since the war, while the number of unfilled jobs frequently has been higher than the number of unemployed. This results, on the one hand, in an upward pressure on wages, obviously judged "excessive" by capitalists. This upward pressure materializes itself in across-the-board wage hikes granted under labor-management negotiations, but above all in a "wage drift" (i.e., a continuous increase in actual pay above and beyond contractually set levels of pay). On the other hand, and most intolerable for the capitalists, the workers' struggle against the conditions of production and of life in the workplace has taken on extraordinary intensity and proportions. We will return to this point at length.

Seized at the throat by this challenge to its power in the factory and by wage hikes and production cost increases that have damaged its crucial export sector, English capitalism has been openly discussing for the past ten years in the columns of its newspapers the need to inject into the economy a good dose of unemployment in order to "discipline the workers." The Tories intentionally organized economic recessions on several occasions: in 1955 (the resulting stagnation in production lasted until 1958), at the beginning of 1960 (production again was stagnant for a year), and then again in July 1961. The problem has not been solved for all that. First, the dose of unemployment was not high enough to achieve their objective. A larger dose risked setting off a real depression, or else an explosion of the class struggle. Second, these recessions, and more generally the government's "antiinflationary" posture, have induced a chronic stagnation in production and productivity that more than anything else has contributed to undermining the competitive position of English products on international markets. Last, and above all, given the combativity of the English proletariat, neither wage pressures nor conflicts over the conditions of production have diminished. These recessions have only added a new cause of conflict (firings) to those that already existed. Frequently, an entire factory goes out on strike now because 50 or 100 workers have received pink slips. This is a sign that the workers are raising on the practical level the problem of who controls the level of employment in the company.

In short, for six years the MacMillan policy was a dunce's policy. Instead of resolving problems, it aggravated them and created new ones. The same can be said for the policies of the Eisenhower administration in the United States, which, in order to fight against working-class pressure,<sup>61</sup> restricted the expansion of overall demand on several occasions and thus provoked a seven-year-long stagnation of American production. This amounted to a potential loss of \$200 to



\$300 billion. As a finale, the Eisenhower administration created an international dollar crisis out of thin air.<sup>62</sup>

We can only provide here a few examples of this dialectic that transforms bureaucratic capitalism's "solutions" to problems into sources of new difficulties.

1. By allowing wage increases, capitalism resolves the problem of finding outlets for its continually expanding production. It simultaneously tries to buy the docility of the workers in production and to push them back into private life. But rising living standards have in no way diminished the pressure of workers' demands on the economic level. In fact, these demands have become stronger than ever. Moreover, when poverty finally seems to have been licked and full employment seems assured, the problem of man's fate in the work process takes on its full importance in the eyes of the workers. This intensifies their revolt against the system of rule in the capitalist factory. In the long run, even the notion of "rising living standards" ultimately refutes itself. The absurdity of this life, of this unending race after electric hares and mechanical carrots, begins to dawn on people.

2. The domestication of trade unions allows capitalism to use them in its own interests. But this provokes among the workers an increasing detachment from their unions, which ultimately even capitalists are obliged to deplore.<sup>63</sup> By integrating the labor bureaucracy into their system, they ensure that it will exercise less and less of a hold over the workers. The edge of this weapon is dulled the more they use it.

3. In bureaucratizing parties and politics, bureaucratic capitalism succeeds in driving the population away from all public activity and removing its leaders from its control. But a society, whether it is "democratic" or overtly totalitarian, cannot function for long in the midst of the citizenry's general indifference. And the total irresponsibility of our great leaders can prove very costly too (as Suez has shown, to take but one example; French Gaullism has been illustrating this point going on three years now).

But why is this necessarily so? Why does every solution furnished by the ruling class to the problems of society remain partial? Why do such solutions always open up a number of new conflicts? It is because the management of the entirety of modern society is beyond the power and capacities of any particular stratum. It is because such management cannot be put into practice in a coherent fashion if the overwhelming majority of people are reduced to the role of executants, if their capacities for organization, initiative, and creation are systematically repressed by this same society they have been called upon to keep functioning.

Bureaucratic capitalism tries to realize on a societywide scale what already was unrealizable on the shop-floor level: to treat all the activities of millions of individuals as a mass of objects to be manipulated. When workers in a shop strictly and faithfully carry out the orders that have been given to them (e.g., "working to rule"), production threatens to grind to a halt. When citizens allow themselves to be completely manipulated by propaganda or behave with the total docility demanded of them by the powers that be, all control and all counterbalance disappear. The field is open to bureaucratic mania and its necessary

product: a Hitler, a Stalin, or the Polish bureaucracy, which collapsed on its own in 1956 because, when everyone works by merely following its orders, nothing works any longer at all, not even the streetcars.

What was theoretically possible in a stagnant (e.g., a slave or feudal) society—namely, complete behavioral conformity on the part of the exploited to immutable, indisputable, unique norms established “for all time”—is impossible in a society existing in a state of perpetual upheaval. Such a society imposes on both masters and subjects the constant need for them to change, to adapt to ever-newer and always unforeseen situations that every day are rendering obsolete the norms, rules, ways of behaving and doing things, techniques, and values of the day before. Caught up in an increasingly accelerated movement, our modern society could not survive for an instant if even the humblest of its members did not contribute to its perpetual renewal—by assimilating new techniques and making them humanly practicable, by adapting or inventing different modes of organization, by changing their consumption patterns and life-styles, and by transforming their ideas and view of the world. By its class structure, however, this society also forbids people from achieving this adaptation and from acting creatively. Bureaucratic capitalism tries to monopolize these functions for the benefit of a minority that is supposed to foresee, define, decide, dictate, and finally to live for everyone.

This is not a philosophical dilemma. We are not saying that bureaucratic capitalism is contrary to human nature. There is no human nature. And someone might say at this point that, precisely for this reason, man cannot become an object and that, consequently, the bureaucratic-capitalist project is utopian. But even this argument remains philosophical, and hence abstract. It is precisely because man is not an object and because he practically exhibits an almost infinite plasticity that he could be—and actually has been—transformed into a quasi-object for long periods of history. In the Roman *ergastulum*, in mines worked by shackled slaves, in the galley, or in the concentration camp, men have been quasi-objects—certainly not for the philosopher or for the moralist, but for their masters. For philosophy, the slave’s gaze and speech will always bear witness to his indestructible humanity. But in the practice of the master, these considerations are of no interest: The slave is subject to the master’s will up to the limit of the slave’s nature. At this limit the slave can escape, break in two like a tool, or collapse like a beast of burden.

Our point of view, in contrast, is sociological and historical: Modern capitalist society, caught up in an accelerated and irreversible movement of self-transformation, cannot, without the risk of collapse, transform its subjects into quasi-objects, even for a few years. The cancer eating away at *this* society comes from the fact that, at the same time, it constantly must try to carry out this process of transformation.

It is crucial for us to add that capitalism does not fail only in its attempt to “rationalize” all of society according to its outlook and its interests. It is just as incapable of “rationalizing” relations within the ruling class itself. The bureaucracy wants to present itself as rationality incarnate, but this rationality is but a phantasm. We will not return here to this question, which, indeed, already has

been discussed.<sup>64</sup> Let us recall simply that the bureaucracy assigns itself a task that is, in itself, impossible: to organize people's lives and activities outside of and against their interests. It thereby not only deprives itself of their collective intervention—which at the same time it is obliged to solicit—but it also nourishes their active opposition.

This opposition manifests itself as a refusal to cooperate in practice and as a refusal to tell the bureaucracy what is going on. Consequently, the bureaucracy is reduced to “making plans” about a real situation of which it is actually ignorant. And, even if it did know what was going on, it could not make adequate judgments because its outlook, its methods, its very categories of thought are narrowly limited and ultimately falsified by its situation as an exploiting stratum separated from society. It can only “plan” in the past tense, since it sees the future merely as repetition on a grander scale of what has been and since it can “dominate” the future only by trying to subordinate it to what it already knows.

Moreover, this entire set of contradictions is relayed back within the bureaucratic apparatus itself and then reproduced there. In expanding and extending itself, the bureaucracy has to organize its “work” by applying its own methods, and hence by creating within the bureaucratic apparatus a division between directors and executants that gives rise within this apparatus to the same contradiction that characterizes the apparatus's relations with society. Far from being able to unify itself, therefore, the bureaucracy becomes deeply divided within itself. This division is aggravated by the fact that the bureaucratic apparatus too is necessarily hierarchical, that the fate of individuals depends on whether they are promoted, and that, in a dynamic society there is no and there can be no “rational” basis for settling the problems of how to promote individuals and how to determine their position within the hierarchical apparatus. The struggle of all against all within the apparatus culminates in the formation of cliques and clans whose activity essentially alters the functioning of the apparatus and destroys its last pretensions to rationality. Information within the apparatus *necessarily* is hidden, distorted, or withheld. The apparatus can function only by laying down fixed and rigid rules that are periodically outdistanced by reality. As often as not, any revision of the rules means the onset of another crisis.

The factors that determine that bureaucratic capitalism will fail in its attempt to organize society totally in its interests are therefore neither accidental nor transient. They arise from the very existence of the capitalist system. They express its most deep-seated structures: the contradictory character of the fundamental capitalist relation; the permanent challenge laid down by the class struggle; the reproduction of conflicts even within the interior of the bureaucratic apparatus and its position of externality in relation to the reality it is supposed to be managing.

This is why these factors cannot be eliminated by any “reform” of the system. Reforms not only leave the contradictory structure of the system intact, they in fact aggravate the expressions of this contradictory structure since every reform implies a bureaucracy to manage it. Reformism is not utopian, as Marxists once believed, because economic laws prevent any alteration in the way the social product is distributed (which is not the case); it is utopian because it is al-

ways, and by definition, bureaucratic. The limited changes reformers try to introduce not only never affect the fundamental capitalist relation; they must be administered by separate groups and ad hoc institutions that are automatically separate from and opposed to the masses. In this sense, modern capitalism itself is reformist; all "working-class" reformism can serve only as capitalism's collaborator in the realization of the latter's innermost tendencies.

*[The Crises of Bureaucratic Capitalism]*

Granted that capitalism is incapable of overcoming its fundamental contradiction, can capitalism nevertheless succeed in organizing modern society "from the outside" so this society can evolve without shocks, jolts, or crises? Do bureaucratic supervision and totalitarianism succeed in ensuring a *coherent* operation of society (coherent from the point of view of the exploiters)? We need only look at the reality around us to see that there is nothing of the sort. Infinitely more aware of the problems confronting it and infinitely richer in the means it has at its disposal than a century ago, capitalist policy always fails when it has to cope with modern social reality.

This failure is expressed, in a permanent fashion, by the tremendous waste characteristic of contemporary societies, even from the point of view of the ruling classes. Their plans never work more than halfway, so to speak. They never can actually dominate the course of social life. But this failure also is expressed, periodically, in *crises* of the established society that capitalism has not succeeded and cannot succeed in eliminating.

By "crises" we do not mean, or do not only mean, economic crises, but also periods of social life where any kind of event (whether economic, political, social, or international) significantly upsets the current functioning of society, temporarily incapacitates existing institutions and mechanisms, and prevents them from immediately reestablishing equilibrium. In this sense, crises, whatever their origin, are inherent in the very nature of the capitalist system. They express its fundamental irrationality and incoherence. It is one thing to say that henceforth capitalism is able to contain economic fluctuations within narrow limits, and that therefore these fluctuations lose much of their previous importance. It is another thing, and infinitely far removed from this first statement, to say that capitalism has become capable of assuring coherent social development (from its own point of view), without shocks or explosions. The sheer size and complexity of present-day social life, and above all the permanent transformations it has undergone, make it impossible for "natural laws" or people's spontaneous reactions to assure the coherent functioning of society.

Such a coherent functioning of society was not a problem during previous stages of history. It now becomes a task that must be assured by ad hoc institutions and activities. The continuous upheavals brought on by technical change and modifications of economic and social relations, the need to coordinate previously unrelated sectors of activity, the growing interdependence of different peoples, industries, and events mean that new problems are constantly cropping up or that previously applied solutions no longer work.

The objective situation thus enjoins the ruling class to organize a coherent social response to these questions. Now, for reasons we have already provided, which relate both to the class structure of society and to its own alienation as an exploiting class, there is no guarantee that it will be up to accomplishing this task. Half the time, so to speak, the ruling class is incapable of doing so. Whenever this happens, a crisis in the strict sense of the term (whether economic, political, international, or of another sort) breaks out.

Each particular crisis, therefore, can appear as an "accident." But in such a system, the existence of accidents of this sort as well as their periodic (though not "regular") repetition are absolutely necessary. The crisis may be a recession more prolonged than usual, or the Algerian War. It may be blacks no longer being willing to put up with the racial discrimination American capitalism is incapable of doing away with. It may be that the Belgian coalfields suddenly stop being profitable one day and that, as a consequence, it is decided simply to wipe the Borinage and its hundreds of thousands of inhabitants off the economic map. Or it may be that Belgium's government, in order to rationalize its finances, creates all on its own a month-long general strike of a million workers. It may be that in East Germany, Poland, or Hungary, at a moment when class tensions are already at their height and when the cracks in the edifice of power are becoming visible for all to see, the bureaucracy can do nothing better than light the fuses of opposition and revolt through acts of provocation.

The capitalist system is not only not immune from such "accidents." One way or another, it inevitably tends to produce them. At such moments, the profound irrationality of the system explodes, the cohesiveness of the social fabric is shredded, and the problem of the overall organization of society is objectively posed. If the need for a reorganization of society is explicitly posed at the same time in the consciousnesses of the working masses, their conscious intervention can transform this accident into social revolution. After all, it has always been in *this* fashion that revolutions have taken place in history, whether this be in the history of capitalism or some previous system of rule. Revolutions have *not* broken out at the moment when an imaginary "dynamic of objective contradictions" reaches the point of paroxysm.

### *VII. The Present Stage of the Class Struggle and the Ripening of the Conditions for Socialism*

Capitalism, whether private or bureaucratic, will inevitably continue to produce crises, even if they will no longer be in the form of economic depressions and even if no one can predict their periodic recurrence. We need only look at the fetid, swampy jungle in which the leaders of this society thrash around debating each other. Whether they call themselves de Gaulle or Kennedy, Khrushchev or MacMillan, their impotence and the sheer stupidity of their responses whenever a really big problem arises are there for all to see. We need only recall the crises, upheavals, tensions, and breakdowns, which have been as full, or fuller, during the last fifteen years than in any other period of history, in order to convince

ourselves that the edifice of *this* exploitative society remains as fragile and shaky as ever.

But this discovery does not suffice by itself as a basis for a revolutionary perspective. In France, for the past four years, one often could say that power lay in the street. But in the street, there was no one to grab it up except car drivers trying to get out of traffic jams. In 1945, German capitalism had absolutely collapsed. A few years later, it had become the most “flourishing” capitalist country in the Western world.

A social crisis is, by its essence, a brief period of transition. If the masses do not intervene during this phase in which established society becomes dislocated, if they do not find in themselves the strength and awareness necessary to institute a new organization of society, the old ruling strata or other social formations will recover their balance or emerge to impose their orientation on society. Society abhors a vacuum. For life to continue, some kind of “order” must be established. In the absence of mass action opening up the possibility of a revolutionary outcome to a crisis, life will resume under the old model, more or less amended according to circumstances and to the exploiters’ needs of domination. The evolution of Poland after 1956 offers one more illustration of this process.<sup>65</sup>

Lenin expressed this by saying that a revolution takes place when those above no longer can cope with the situation and those below no longer will tolerate it. But the experience of defeated revolutions and movements over the past forty years shows that, as far as the socialist revolution is concerned, these conditions are not sufficient. We must add: “when those below will no longer tolerate it *and know too, more or less, what they want instead.*” It is not enough for the system of exploitation to be in a state of crisis for the population to get mixed up in the matter. The *conscious* intervention of the masses is required. They must use their capacities for defining socialist objectives and orienting themselves in an infinitely complex situation so that they can realize these objectives. Numerous examples have shown this, the most recent being the Belgian general strike of 1961.

In speaking of consciousness in this context, we do not mean a theoretical consciousness, a clear and precise system of ideas existing before practice. The consciousness of the working masses develops in and through action. A revolution, as a matter of fact, is a phase of genetic mutation in history. But this eminently *practical* consciousness of the revolutionary masses does not arise out of nothing. In some fashion, its premises have to have been laid down during the preceding period. The problem to which we must respond is this: Do the conditions for socialist consciousness among the proletariat still obtain under modern capitalism?<sup>e</sup>

*[The Present Stage of the Class Struggle]*

There is only one way to answer this question. It is to examine the actions and behavior of workers in modern capitalist countries and to analyze the present stage of the class struggle. What such an analysis immediately reveals is the ex-

treme contrast between the behavior of the proletariat *in production* and its attitude *outside production*, when faced with politics and society in general.

Take a country like England. As we have already said, there has been "full employment" there since the war. Real wages have increased on average by 2-2.5 percent per year. Social Security provides much better coverage than in France. More than four million housing units have been built in the past fifteen years. Nevertheless, to the despair of English capitalists and to the greater bewilderment of industrial sociologists and psychologists, working-class struggles have lost none of their former intensity or depth. On the contrary. We will publish in the future a special study on this question. For the moment, let us summarize the most important characteristics of these struggles and of the behavior of the English proletariat.

1. *The organization of struggles and of the workers.* There are "official" strikes, that is to say, ones set in motion by the decision of (or with the agreement of) the union leadership. Even for these strikes, the initiative usually belongs to the workers and to their shop stewards, who decide to strike and then obtain the union's approval. Strikes that are really decided upon by the union leadership—the great battles involving an entire corporation—are rather rare. More and more often we are seeing "unofficial" strikes, ones that have not received the leadership's approval or that take place *against* its formal opposition.

Despite being unofficial, these strikes are not unorganized. Far from it. A large role in organizing such strikes is played by the shop stewards, as indeed also is the case in all of working-class life in the workplace. "Unofficial" strikes as well as almost all "official" ones are limited to a single factory. They are always decided upon by general assemblies of the affected workers. And they are never ended unless a general meeting of strikers decides so by a vote.

These shop stewards do not resemble the French *délégués d'atelier*, who are either tools of the trade-union bureaucracy or its hostages. Instead, they are authentic representatives of the workers. They are elected from the shop floor and are subject to recall. Though they are union members like everyone else in England, the shop stewards do not necessarily accept the union's directives. Very often they oppose such orders. There are no examples of stewards elected by the workers who have been refused their credentials (which establish their status with their employers) by the union. The shop stewards are organized autonomously from the unions (and for good reason, since in England there are still only craft unions and no industrial unions; workers from one factory can easily belong to thirty different unions, a peculiarity, no doubt, that has favored a certain independence on the part of the shop stewards in relation to the unions).

The shop stewards in each factory meet regularly (generally weekly). Their committees have their own activities and resources, coming from workers' contributions, lotteries, etc. There also are shop steward committees bringing together the stewards from all the companies of a given district as well as national committees, organized industry by industry.

2. *Demands.* It can be shown statistically that strictly economic demands account for a decreasing proportion of strikes. The kinds of demands that more and more are at the basis of strikes today concern conditions of production in the

most general sense (coffee breaks, time-study issues and speedups, repercussions from alterations in machinery and production methods, etc.). Questions of hiring and firing and, quite often, solidarity with other striking workers set off strikes.<sup>66</sup>

3. *Combativity and solidarity of the workers.* There hardly ever is a strike without a picket line. Frequently, when one category of workers in a factory goes out on strike, other groups or even the entire work force go out with them to show support. Goods leaving a struck factory, or the materials or parts that are supposed to be transported there, are declared "black." This is tantamount to a prohibition for workers in other factories to use them or for truckers to handle them. There are *always* large solidarity collections taken up by other factories in the area.

4. *General atmosphere.* It is impossible to convey, in a schematic summary, the climate of struggle and just plain factory life that emerges from the detailed descriptions and stories provided by our English comrades. Complete solidarity among the workers manifests itself nonstop. A virtually permanent challenge to the power of management and foremen is born out of a thousand events in the everyday life of the factory.

These features, which on the whole apply for all of English industry, appear most clearly in certain very large but quite varying sectors of industry (mining; automobile manufacturing and the engineering industries generally; shipyard, dock, and transport workers, among others). We are not saying that the situation in this regard is identical at all times in every English factory. But the features summarized here define the typical tendencies of the most highly developed form of class struggle in a modern capitalist country. This conclusion is corroborated by what is happening in the United States.<sup>67</sup>

This situation, however, does not prevent the English proletariat or the Scandinavian proletariat or even the American proletariat from being completely inactive in politics. One could argue that, by supporting a Labour or Social Democratic party, English workers, like Swedish, Danish, or Norwegian workers, are voicing essentially reformist political aspirations that coincide with the policies of these parties. But that is a very superficial view. One cannot consider as two isolated and unrelated facts that these very same English workers, who are so "bloody-minded" with the boss and so active as a social group in the workplace, have as their sole political activity to vote Labour once every five years during a general election. When one looks at the Labour party, one realizes that its (theoretical or real) program in no way differs radically from that of the Tories, and one sees that for the past ten years it would have acted exactly the same as its Conservative counterpart; when one knows that the conservative parties in Scandinavia, if they were returned to power, would be neither able nor willing to change any of the reforms carried out by Swedish or Norwegian reformist parties that have been in power for sixteen years or more, one is obliged to provide some other explanation for the workers' electoral support in these countries. Such votes are votes cast for the "lesser evil." The meaning of this voting behavior becomes clearer in light of the total indifference manifested by the population in general and the working class in particular with regard to po-



litical parties and their “activity,” up to and including during elections. People still bother to put their ballots in a box, but they hardly ever attend political meetings, still less take part in electoral campaigns.

There is nothing fundamentally unacceptable to capitalism in the Labour program or in the power held by Scandinavian socialist parties. Contemporary reformism is just another way of managing capitalism and, in the end, of preserving it. When one considers this state of affairs, the meaning of the political attitude of workers in modern countries appears in a clear light. The proletariat no longer expresses itself as a class on the political plane; it no longer expresses a will to transform or even to orient society in its own direction. On the terrain of politics, it acts at the very most as just another “pressure group.”

*[The Crisis of Socialization]*

This disappearance of political activity, and more generally what we have called “privatization,” is not peculiar to the working class. Privatization is a general phenomenon that can be found among all categories of the population. It gives expression to the profound crisis contemporary society is undergoing. As the flip side of the bureaucratic coin, it is a manifestation of the agony of social and political institutions that, having rejected the population, are now rejected by it. It is the sign of people’s impotence before the enormous social machinery they have created that they no longer can understand or exert control over. Thus it is the radical condemnation of this machinery. It expresses the decomposition of values, of social significations, and of communities.

In production we see the contradiction between the extremely collectivized nature of work, the growing interdependence of the workers’ productive activities, on the one hand, and the organization of work by a bureaucracy that treats each worker as an isolated unit, separated from all others, on the other hand. Similarly, on the scale of society, we see today, pushed to its limits, the contradiction between the total socialization of individuals, their extreme dependence on national and world society, on the one hand, and the atomization of life, the impossibility of integrating individuals beyond the close circle of the family—which, indeed, is itself also disintegrating more and more.

The difference—and it is an immense one—is that in production the workers constantly try to find a positive outcome to this contradiction. In fighting both the bureaucratic organization of work and the atomization it subjects them to, they set up informal groups for both work and struggle.<sup>68</sup> As torn, conflict-ridden, constantly threatened, repeatedly broken up and just as often put back together as it is, the shop-floor or factory community of workers always exists as a tendency that capitalism does not succeed in destroying, either as class activity or in terms of the positive socialization of the workers on the level of production.

At the point of production, class action and the positive socialization of the workers are constantly being sustained by the very structure of capitalism. The way the system is structured obliges the worker to fight against the externally imposed organization of work, both to protect himself *and* to succeed in produc-

ing anything at all. The resulting struggle constantly nourishes the socialization process, which in turn reinforces this struggle. And all of capitalism's efforts—including hierarchization, selective personnel policies, unfair discrimination, periodic disruptions of work teams, and so on—do not and never will succeed in taming either process.

On the contrary, the modernization of capitalism not only intensifies this struggle at the point of production but gives it a deeper content. First, the evolution of technique and the organization of production raise ever more sharply the problem of man's actual participation in his work. Second, as other problems that used to preoccupy the working class begin to lose their previously vital importance and as recourse to the blackmail of hunger and unemployment becomes impossible, the question of the worker's fate in the production process becomes the vital question. When one is hungry and thousands of unemployed workers are at the gate, one will accept any work and any kind of factory regime. Now things have changed.

As we saw in the case of England, the workers' struggle ceases, then, to be a narrowly economic one. It now also takes aim against the enslavement and alienation of the worker *qua* producer, his enslavement to the enterprise's management, and his dependence on the fluctuations of the labor market. Whatever may be the "explicit awareness" of English workers, their actual behavior—in daily factory life as well as during "unofficial" strikes—implicitly raises the following question: Who is master in the enterprise? Thus it also raises, even if it is in an embryonic and fragmentary way, the whole problem of the *management* of production.

At the point of production, the working class appears to act in a unified and coherent fashion. Out of itself, and with the aid of the shop stewards, there arises a form of organization embodying proletarian democracy and effectiveness. But nothing similar exists on the social plane. The crisis of capitalism has reached the stage where it becomes a crisis of socialization as such. And this crisis affects the proletariat as much as other strata of the population. Collective methods of action, whatever they may be, are emptied of their content and collapse. Nothing but their bureaucratic carcasses remain. This is true not only of political activities and other kinds that aim at a precise goal. It is equally true of disinterested activities.

For instance, *popular festivals*, a creation of humanity from time immemorial, tend to disappear as a social phenomenon in modern societies. They now survive only as *spectacle*, a physical conglomeration of individuals no longer positively communicating with each other, but merely coexisting through their anonymous and passive, juxtaposed relations. In such events only one pole of people is active nowadays: Its function is to make the event "live" for the others, who are just onlookers. The show, a performance by a specialized individual or group before an impersonal and transitory public, thus becomes the model for contemporary socialization. Each person is passive in relation to the community and no longer perceives the other as a possible subject of exchange, communication, and cooperation, but only as inert body limiting his own movements.

It was in no way accidental that observers of the Belgian strikes in Wallonia,

in January 1961, were so struck by the genuinely festive appearance of the country and of the people in their conduct, despite being in a state of need and despite the difficult struggle they were in the midsts of. They overcame tremendous physical and material difficulties by resurrecting a real society, a true community, and through the fact that each positively existed for the others. Henceforth, only amid eruptions of class struggle can what is completely dead in instituted society be revived, namely, a passion shared by people that becomes a source of action rather than passivity; emotions that do not send them back into isolation and a state of stupor, but rather toward a community that acts to transform what currently exists.<sup>69</sup>

The disappearance of political activity among workers is both the result of and the condition for the evolution of capitalism as we have described it here. By transforming capitalism, the labor movement was in turn transformed by it. Working-class organizations have been integrated into the system of established institutions. At the same time, their very substance has been assimilated by this system. Their objectives, their methods of action, their organizational forms, and their relations with the workers are being modeled, to an increasing degree, on capitalist prototypes. Without being able to go into an analysis here of this historical process,<sup>70</sup> we are trying to show how, in a perpetually renewed fashion, its results today condition the workers' retreat from political activity.

The bureaucratization of labor organizations drives the workers away from collective action. This begins when the workers agree to follow a stable body of leaders and to delegate their power to this body on a permanent basis. It culminates in the constitution of bureaucratic strata within political and trade-union organizations. Managing these organizations like a capitalist managerial apparatus manages a factory or a State, these strata soon find themselves face-to-face with the same contradiction: how to obtain people's participation while at the same time excluding them. This insoluble contradiction produces much more devastating effects here than those that obtain in production, for in order to live one must eat, but one does not have to get involved in politics. Moreover, this helps explain why the workers' retreat is less extensive in relation to the unions than in relation to political parties. Trade unions can still appear to have some relation to one's daily bread.

This is the result one gets when the unions' forms of organization, methods of action, and relations with the workers become bureaucratized. But the effects leading to what is properly called *ideological* degeneration are just as important. There no longer is any revolutionary ideology or even simply a working-class ideology present on a societywide scale (i.e., not just cultivated in a few sects). What "working-class" organizations propose, when they propose anything at all besides electoral and legislative maneuvers, does not differ essentially from what capitalism itself proposes, partially achieves, and in any case tolerates. These proposals—increases in material consumption and "leisure" emptied of all content, hierarchy and merit promotions, elimination of superficial "irrationalities" in the organization of society—all derive from essentially capitalist values.

The labor movement had begun in a radically different way, even though it did not completely eschew partial objectives at the start. It had begun as a

project and a promise of radical transformation in the relations between people, of an instauration of equality and mutual recognition, of the abolition of bosses, of real freedom. All this has now disappeared, even as demagogy. “Working-class” organizations claim that if they were in power they would increase production and consumption more rapidly, would reduce the length of the working day, and would extend the present type of education to more people—in short, they claim they would be able to achieve capitalist objectives better and more quickly than capitalism itself. Russian production is increasing more rapidly than American production, Russian sputniks are bigger and go farther than American sputniks. So there you are!

We are not saying that workers retain in their hearts a pure and unchanging image of socialist society, compare it with the program of the SFIO<sup>71</sup> or the French Communist party, and then conclude that they no longer want to support these parties. To a very large degree, capitalist goals and objectives have penetrated into the proletariat. But—and this is the real point—the achievement of these objectives does not require the activity or the participation of the workers any more than what a bourgeois party asks of its supporters. Electoral support suffices. And, inversely, these “working-class” parties and organizations cannot get from people anything more than participation on the electoral level.<sup>72</sup>

Thus we have in the workers’ political apathy the convergence of two processes. Alienated and oppressed in production as always—or rather like never before—the working class struggles against its condition and challenges the capitalist management’s domination of the enterprise. But it no longer succeeds in extending this struggle onto the social level, for it no longer encounters any organization, any idea, any perspective distinct from the infamy of capitalism, any movement that symbolizes the hope of new relations among people. It is therefore natural that it turns toward private compensations and solutions. In doing so, it encounters a capitalist system that lends itself more and more to such compensations. As we have seen, it is indeed not accidental that amid this general collapse of values, the sole remaining value is *the* “private” value par excellence, that of consumption,<sup>73</sup> nor that capitalism frenetically exploits this situation. Thus it is that, with relative job security, an increasing “standard of living,” and the illusion or the slim chance of promotion, workers—like other individuals—try to manufacture a meaning for their lives out of consumption and leisure pursuits.

*[The Real Conditions for a Socialist Revolution]*

This is the stage that the class struggle in modern societies has now reached. The question to which we must now respond is the following: Does this situation cripple or does it corroborate the revolutionary perspective? Using the traditional terminology, does modern capitalism continue to produce the conditions for a socialist revolution or does it not?

The modern revolutionary movement is not a movement for moral reform that, in addressing the inner and eternal nature of man, calls upon him to bring about a better world. Since Marx—and in this respect, every revolutionary wor-

thy of the name will always remain a Marxist—it has been a movement based upon an analysis of history and society that shows that the struggle of a class of people in capitalist society, the working class, can attain its objective only by abolishing this society and, with it, its classes and by instaurating a new society that suppresses exploitation and man's social alienation.<sup>74</sup> The question of socialism can truly be raised only in a capitalist society, and it will be resolved only in terms of a development that takes place *in* this society. But within Marxism, this key idea very quickly was obscured and then buried under a mythology of “objective conditions of the socialist revolution.” It is this mythology that must be destroyed.

The “ripening of the objective conditions for socialism” traditionally was seen in terms of a sufficient degree of development of the material forces of production. This was the case because “no social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed” (K. Marx, Preface to *The Critique of Political Economy*); because socialism cannot be built upon a base of material poverty; because, finally, through the development of the forces of production, the “objective” contradictions of the capitalist economy would be brought to the point of paroxysm, bringing with them either a collapse or a permanent crisis in the system.

These kinds of considerations and the methodology producing them must be radically eliminated. There is no level of development of production beneath which the socialist revolution would be doomed to failure or beyond which it would be assured of success. However elevated it may become, the level of the productive forces will never guarantee that a socialist revolution will not degenerate if the central factor is missing, namely, the permanent and total activity of the proletariat aimed at transforming social life. Who is foolish enough to assert that the socialist revolution is three times riper in the United States than in Western Europe because per capita production is three times higher there?

If it is beyond dispute that socialism cannot be built upon poverty, it also must be understood that a society based upon exploitation will never create sufficient abundance to abolish or even to attenuate the antagonisms between individuals and groups. The same mechanistic mentality that holds that there is a set level of consumption for the worker in capitalist society also makes one believe that there is a definable saturation point for human needs and that “the war of all against all” would be lessened as one approaches this point.<sup>75</sup> But as capitalism develops, new needs also necessarily develop, and antagonisms over material needs are incomparably greater in modern society than in a primitive African village. It is not the existence of a greater or lesser abundance of material needs, but rather a different attitude among the proletariat toward the problem of consumption that allows it to go beyond this antagonism—and this different attitude emerges every time the proletariat enters into action to transform society. For this is but one of the aspects of the rupture with the previous order of things.

We must equally eliminate the idea that the ripening of the conditions for socialism consists of an “increase” or an “intensification” in the objective contradictions of capitalism (i.e., those that are independent of class action or inevita-

bly determinative of this action). We have shown in the first part of this text that any economic dynamic based upon “objective contradictions” is imaginary. Let us add that, from the point of view of the revolutionary perspective, it is also superfluous. Such ridiculous expressions as “constantly growing contradictions” and “ever-deeper crises” ought to be relegated to the record library of Stalinist incantations. Contradictions cannot be growing because they are not pumpkins. It is hard to imagine any “deeper” crises than those that affected the United States and Europe in 1933, or Germany and all of continental Europe in 1945. Established society was then totally dislocated. What would such a “deeper crisis” in the future consist of? A return to cannibalism?

The question is not whether “ever-deeper crises” will take place in the future. Crises that were as deep as possible have occurred and will continue to occur as long as capitalism endures. The question is whether the key factor, namely, the proletariat’s conscious intervention (whose absence in the past has prevented a revolutionary transformation of these crises), will someday take place and, if so, why. *There is only one condition for socialism, and it is neither “objective” nor “subjective,” but historical. It is the existence of the proletariat as a class that, in its struggle, develops itself as the bearer of a socialist project.*

We do not mean by this that capitalism remains the same in relation to revolutionary possibilities inherent in it. We are not saying that its “objective” evolution does not matter since it will produce crises no matter what. Nor are we saying that today, in 1961, as in 1871, the question remains the same: Will the proletariat be capable of intervening and carrying through its project to the end? This timeless view, this analysis of revolutionary essences, has nothing to do with what we are saying.

The first and foremost reason for this is that there is no revolution without the proletariat, and the proletariat is a product of capitalist development. It is the very movement of capitalism that, in proletarianizing society, broadens—and here we are speaking quantitatively—the basis of the socialist revolution. In other words, the reason is that it multiplies the numbers of compartmentalized, exploited, and alienated wage earners and ultimately makes them into the majority of capitalist society.

Second, the way in which this exploitative system is lived and criticized by a proletarian (even if he is an office worker and even if he enjoys a rising standard of living) is radically different from the way a poor peasant has experienced and criticized this system. Early capitalism often condemned the poor peasant to die of hunger. But this did not move him any closer to *socialism*. To the extent that he experiences exploitation and oppression in his work, the modern wage earner in a large company, on the other hand, can only conclude from this experience that there needs to be a socialist reorganization of production and of society. Between the impoverished peasant and socialism there is, so to speak, an infinity of false solutions; between the modern wage earner and socialism none (outside of individual solutions, which are not class solutions). For the Russian proletariat in 1917, the peasantry was an immense battering ram whose weight permitted the working class to bring down czarism. But this very weight later on greatly hindered the course of the revolution. There is no common standard of measure-

ment in this respect between the Russia of 1917 and the American, European, or Russian situation today, precisely because the evolution of capitalism has created in these societies a huge majority who are wage earners. For them, when they break out of their inactivity, only socialist solutions will appear possible. The proletariat alone is a revolutionary class since for it alone the central problem of socialism, man's fate in production, is posed in terms of its everyday existence.

Finally, capitalist concentration provides the framework for a collective organization of society, and its evolution continually refers people back to the problem of its overall organization. By its objective structure, present-day capitalism shows each person, in his work and in his life, that the problem is that of abolishing alienation and the division between directors and executants. It also makes them see immediately that the problem of society is of the very same nature, precisely because it tends to transform society into one huge bureaucratic enterprise. The more the bureaucratic way of organizing capitalism spreads throughout society and covers it, the more all conflict tends to be modeled on the fundamental contradiction of the system. People's experience of modern society tends to become unified and become part of the same conflict, lived by everyone everywhere as their daily fate. The very development of capitalism demolishes the "objective" foundations for the existence of a ruling class, both on the technical level (the entire planning bureaucracy already can be replaced by electronic calculators) and on the social level (by unveiling the inherently *negative* role of the rulers in the eyes of the ruled). Capitalism gives birth to an exigency for a rational management of society that it constantly counters in its actions. In this way, capitalism increasingly is providing the elements for future socialist solutions.

On the other hand, we *are* saying that none of these factors has a positive signification by itself, independently of people's actions. For they all are contradictory or ambiguous, as you wish. The proletarianization of society is accompanied by its hierarchization. This does not mean, as Marx believed, that a handful of supercapitalists one day will find themselves isolated in a sea of proletarians. Technical progress, which could provide a revolutionary power with immense opportunities, meanwhile has been furnishing capitalists with the means of violence or subtle control over society surpassing anything one previously could have imagined. The spread of technological know-how goes hand in hand with what Philippe Guillaume has called a terrifying neoilliteracy. The development of capitalism also is, as we have said at length, a development of consumerism that has appeared to the exploited for an entire period of time as an alternative solution. The crisis of values renders capitalist society almost ungovernable, but in this crisis the values, ideas, and organizations to which the proletariat gave birth are also caught up. In brief, a victorious revolution took place in Russia in 1917, none have taken place since then in much more highly advanced countries. Revolutionaries do not possess any capital deposited in the Bank of History that accumulates at compound interest.

If there is then a ripening of the conditions for socialism, it never can be a ripening of "objective conditions." For purely objective conditions do not, by themselves, have any definite signification. Such a ripening can only be a pro-

gression of another kind. And this progression can be discovered when one looks at the succession of working-class revolutions. It is the upward curve that connects the high points of proletarian action: from 1848 to 1871, to 1917 to 1956. What was in 1848 in Paris a vague demand for economic and social equality became in Russia in 1917 the expropriation of the capitalists. And this negative and still indeterminate objective was clarified through subsequent experience and then replaced during the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 with the positive demand that the producers have dominance over the production process, i.e., the demand for workers' management. The form of class power becomes more precise, from the Commune of 1871 to the soviets of 1917 and from these soviets to the network of factory councils of 1956.

There is therefore a process of development that, though certainly interrupted and contradictory, has been positive. This process is not "objective" in the sense that it is nothing but the development of the *embodied meaning* of working-class action. But neither is it a merely "subjective" process of training and educating workers through the vicissitudes of their actions. There is no experience that, in any real sense, becomes embedded or sedimented in the working class. There is no memory of the proletariat since there is no "consciousness of the proletariat" except as a metaphorical expression.<sup>76</sup> And even among individual workers during the lulls between two phases of revolutionary activity, most of the time one would seek in vain for a clear memory of events, for a conscious elaboration of ideas, or for the beginnings of a new definition of objectives and means. Generally speaking, one finds only confusion, apathy, and often even the resurgence of reactionary ideas.

How then does this progression occur? In part, certainly, through a kind of apprenticeship or a conscious experience among certain elements—whose role we certainly do not want to minimize since it is, after all, they who are revolutionaries. But this experience of a "vanguard," which will play the role of a catalyst at the beginning of a new phase of working-class activity,<sup>77</sup> would have no effect if at the same time the working-class masses did not themselves become in some way sharper and more ready—were it only a matter of accepting new conclusions—and if they did not prepare themselves for a new and higher phase of activity.

What does such preparation mean? It means that in the meantime the proletariat, through its previous revolutionary action or its everyday activity, has transformed society and therefore also the terms of the problem. At each instant, the experience of the proletariat is formed out of contemporary reality, and not out of the "lessons of the past." But present reality contains within it the results of past action, for it is nothing other than the product of preceding stages of the class struggle. As part of the reality to be transformed in its present-day situation, the proletariat finds deposited both some partially realized objectives and others that, in the process of being realized, have changed their meaning: These are the victories and defeats, the truths and errors of yesterday. In transforming reality through its never-ending action—whether such action is hidden or brilliantly there for all to see—the proletariat at the same



time transforms the conditions for its subsequent coming to awareness. It, so to speak, obliges itself to carry the struggle to a higher level during the next stage.

This dialectic, which is immanent within the class struggle, is not due to any kind of magic, nor does it express a preestablished harmony, nor does it even prove that communism has been assigned as the goal of human history by a revolutionary Providence. It simply means that, as long as the solutions the proletariat seeks to its problems are "false," partial, or inadequate, the problem remains in its entirety, and every new attempt to resolve it has to begin by combating what the old solutions have become in practice.

The proletariat can try to improve its conditions through reformism. As soon as reforms are achieved (as in contemporary society) and if it resumes its struggle, it can only go beyond them and combat them since reformism has become an integral part of the reality to be destroyed. The proletariat can try to liberate itself by putting some party (i.e., ultimately a bureaucracy) in power. The very realization of this solution will lead the workers to surpass it and combat it, as they did in 1956, for they will see in this bureaucracy another form of capitalist power.

As long as society remains based upon exploitation, the tension perpetually maintained between the objective of man's liberation and the transitory forms in which workers, through their action, believed they could vest their hopes for its realization will drive history forward. The ripening of conditions for socialism is thus the accumulation of objective conditions for an adequate consciousness. This accumulation is itself the product of the action of the proletariat. And this process is neither "objective" nor "subjective." It is *historical*. The subjective exists only inasmuch as it modifies the objective, and the objective has no other signification than what the actions of the subjective confer upon it in a given context and connection.

We can see in this process an elimination of false solutions provided we understand that this process of elimination is not mental but real and that the process is not a random one where, among an infinity of false solutions, first one, then another, and then another are haphazardly tried and then eliminated. The attempts at a solution are objectively connected, since they are attempts at solving the same problem in the same historical context. They are also subjectively connected since it is the same class that is seeking to solve them. Second, there is not an infinity of false solutions. Not everything is possible. Modern society provides a framework. Finally, there is *one true* solution. This last statement differentiates the revolutionary from the philosopher of history.

*[The Revolutionary Perspective Today]*

The question we must ask ourselves is this: Does this ripening of the conditions for socialism, does this dialectical progression, continue in the present era? To answer this question, let us summarize our views by looking at three main areas:

1. Production and worker's management.
2. Bureaucracy and politics.

### 3. Values and the standard of living.

1. We have already shown that present conditions make workers see that their daily and immediate problems are themselves the central problem of socialism: work and the way it is organized, man's role in the production process, and people's work relations—in short, the question of the *management* and *goals* of work. The growing importance of struggles over living and working conditions in the factory, which we described in the case of England, as well as the demands for workers' management and the abolition of work norms put forth by the Hungarian workers' councils in 1956 attest to the fact that this is no theoretical extrapolation. It is a real progression that has been conditioned by the bureaucracy's coming to power in Hungary and by the partial "satisfaction" of narrowly economic demands and the achievement of full employment in England and the United States.

2. That the bureaucracy's coming to power in the East would give the workers a real experience of the nature of the bureaucracy and that this experience would sooner or later lead to revolutionary conclusions have been for us key ideas from the very beginning.<sup>78</sup> In Eastern countries, the "working-class" bureaucracy has become the ruling class; consequently, the experience the proletariat has had of "its" bureaucracy is immediately and directly an experience of its character as an exploiting class. In Western countries, insofar as "working-class" organizations still have not been completely integrated into and identified with the system of exploitation, their bureaucratization brings in its wake an experience of the bureaucracy as a "political (or trade-union) leadership [*direction*]." As a result, the workers tend to withdraw from politics.

But this experience today is taking on a new character. What we have called privatization is an expression of an experience of bureaucratic politics. But this experience no longer concerns just the content of politics; the very form of traditional politics, its existence as such, is being put into question. After experiencing reformism, some workers went to the Third International, and after experiencing Stalinism, some workers passed over to Trotskyism. By doing so, they were criticizing and going beyond a certain kind of politics as they tried to replace it with another. But the working class today rejects political activity as such, independently of its content.

There is no simple meaning for this phenomenon: Undoubtedly, it signifies a withdrawal, a temporary inability to confront the problem of society. As such, it is anything but positive. But there is something more and different than just this. The rejection of politics as it exists today is, in a certain fashion, the wholesale rejection of present-day society. What is being rejected is the content of all "programs" because all these programs—whether conservative, reformist, or "communist"—merely represent different variants of the same type of society. Also being rejected, moreover, is every *type of activity* represented by traditional politics. Politics as it is practiced by traditional organizations consists of a separate set of activities carried out by specialists who are cut off from the preoccupations of ordinary people. Such activities are a tissue of lies and manipulation, a grotesque farce that often ends in tragedy.

Today depoliticization is a criticism of the separation of politics from life, of the artificial mode of existence of parties, and of the selfish motivations of politicians just as much as it is indifference. It is directed against the ineffectiveness and the gratuitousness of present-day politics as well as its transformation into a specialized profession. It therefore implicitly contains a new exigency: that political activity should be about what really matters in life, that new methods of action should be sought and applied, that new relations between people should find expression in their political organizing.

3. We have already discussed the factors that have led to a "rising standard of living," and we have described how consumption has become a compensatory solution for a working class that, for the time being, does not see or is incapable of creating a social solution to its true problems. But this "rising standard of living" carries the seeds of its own destruction. And its destruction will pose—and already does pose—the whole problem of the value and meaning of human life.

First of all, the "rising standard of living" has no limits. It becomes an endless race after "more" and "newer" things. Ultimately, however, it will serve as its own condemnation. There is always another "more" beyond the last one. The religion of the new too will have to become outdated sooner or later according to its own premises.

Second, the expansion of consumption under capitalism creates flagrant contradictions on both the individual and social levels. The worker falls asleep in front of the television, exhausted after all the overtime he put in to buy the set. People spend their time in traffic jams since everyone now has his own means of transportation. We could furnish many more such examples.

Obviously no one can predict when or how this phase will reach the point of self-exhaustion.<sup>79</sup> What is certain is that the continued expansion of this kind of consumption now makes it possible to criticize and demystify the whole process. When this critique and demystification start to get off the ground they will pose a challenge to everything that is done in life under capitalism. They will show that consumption in itself has no meaning for man, that leisure pursuits are in themselves empty. Do we live merely to acquire an increasing number of ever more intricate and ever more useless gadgets while exhausting ourselves in increasingly absurd labors? Should we spend each week waiting for a Sunday haunted by the idea of the week to come? Living on borrowed time amid the wearying internal contradictions of capitalistic consumption and capitalistic leisure pursuits, sooner or later workers will be brought back to the true problems: Why produce and why work? What kind of production and what kind of work? What kinds of relations between people should there be, and what kind of orientation for society as a whole?

For workers, present-day conditions raise the problems of workers' management of production and of the fate of man in the labor process. By coming to power, the bureaucracy points to itself as the enemy to be combated. The manipulation of consumers will reach its limits. When the proletariat enters into struggle again, it will find itself infinitely closer to the objectives and methods of socialism than in any other period in its history.

### *VIII. For a Modern Revolutionary Movement*

It remains for us now to draw practical conclusions from the foregoing. For those who have understood what we have been saying, there is no need for any special justification.

1. As an organized movement, the revolutionary movement must be rebuilt from rock bottom. This reconstruction will find a solid base in the development of working-class experience, but it presupposes a radical rupture with present-day organizations, their ideology, their mentality, their methods, and their actions. Everything that has existed and exists today in instituted form in the labor movement—parties, trade unions, etc.—is irremediably and irrevocably finished, rotten, integrated into exploiting society. There can be no miraculous solutions. Everything must be remade at the cost of a long and patient labor. Everything must be started over again [*recommencer*], but starting from the immense experience of a century of working-class struggles, and with a proletariat that finds itself closer than ever to genuine solutions.

2. Equivocations about the socialist program created by degenerated “working-class” organizations (whether Stalinist or reformist) must be destroyed down to their very roots. The idea that socialism coincides in any way with the nationalization of the means of production or with planning, that it basically aims at—or that people ought to aim at—increasing production and consumption are ideas that must be mercilessly denounced. Their basic identity with the underlying orientation of capitalism must be repeatedly shown.

Workers’ management of production and society and the power of workers’ councils as the necessary form of socialism should be demonstrated and illustrated, starting from recent historical experience. The basic content of socialism is the restitution of people’s domination over their own lives; the transformation of work from an absurd form of bread winning into the free deployment of the creative forces of individuals and groups; the constitution of integrated human communities; the unification of people’s culture and lives. This content should not be embarrassingly hidden as some kind of speculation about an indeterminate future, but rather put forward as the sole response to the problems that today torment and stifle people and society. The socialist program ought to be presented for what it is: a program for the humanization of work and of society. It ought to be shouted from the rooftops that socialism is not a backyard of leisure attached to the industrial prison, or transitors for the prisoners. It is the destruction of the industrial prison itself.

3. Revolutionary criticism of capitalist society should switch its axis. In the first place, it should denounce in all its forms the inhuman and absurd character of work today. It should unveil the arbitrariness and monstrosity of hierarchy in production and in society, its total lack of justification, the tremendous wastefulness and strife it generates, the total incompetency of those who rule, the contradictions and irrationality of the bureaucratic management of each enterprise, of the economy, of the State, and of society. It ought to show that, whatever the rise in the “standard of living,” the problem of people’s needs is not resolved even in the richest of societies, that consumption in the capitalist mode is full of

contradictions and ultimately absurd. Finally, it ought to broaden itself to encompass all aspects of life, to denounce the disintegration of communities, the dehumanization of relations between individuals, the content and methods of capitalist education, the monstrosity of modern cities, and the double oppression imposed upon women and youth.

4. Traditional organizations were based on the idea that economic demands constituted the central problem confronting workers and that capitalism was incapable of satisfying these demands. This idea should be categorically repudiated since it corresponds to nothing in present-day reality. The revolutionary organization and the trade-union activity of revolutionary militants cannot be founded upon a game of outbidding others about economic demands, which the unions more or less have successfully defended and which are achievable within the capitalist system without major difficulties. The basis for permanent trade-union reformism is to be found in the possibility of such wage increases. This is also one of the conditions for their irreversible degeneration into bureaucratic organizations. Capitalism can survive only by granting wage increases. For this reason, bureaucratized, reformist trade unions are indispensable to it.

This does not mean that revolutionary militants necessarily ought to leave the unions or no longer interest themselves in economic demands. But neither of these points retains the central importance they once were given.

5. The wage earner's humanity is less and less subject to attack by economic poverty putting his physical existence into danger. It is more and more threatened by the nature and conditions of his work, by the oppression and alienation he suffers in the production process. Now, in this field there is not, and cannot be, lasting reform, but only a struggle with unstable results that are never fully established. For one cannot reduce alienation by 3 percent per annum. Nor is the organization of the productive process ever free from the upheavals of technical change. In this field, too, the trade unions cooperate with management down the line. A key task of the revolutionary movement is to help workers organize their struggle against living and working conditions in the capitalist enterprise.

6. Relations of exploitation in contemporary society more and more are taking the form of hierarchical relations. Respect for the value of hierarchy, which is sustained by "working-class" organizations, becomes the last support for the whole system. The revolutionary movement ought to organize a systematic struggle against the ideology of hierarchy in all its forms, including wage and salary hierarchy and the hierarchy among different jobs in each company.

7. In all struggles, the way in which a result is obtained is as important as and even more important than what is obtained. Even with regard to immediate effectiveness, actions organized and directed by the workers themselves are superior to actions decided and directed bureaucratically. But above all, these alone create the conditions for pushing the movement forward, for they alone teach the workers how to manage their own affairs. The supreme criterion guiding the activity of the revolutionary movement ought to be the idea that when it intervenes it aims not at replacing but at developing the workers' initiative and autonomy.

8. Even when struggles in production reach a great intensity and attain a high level, the passage to the overall problem of society remains the hardest one for the workers to make. In this field, therefore, the revolutionary movement has a key task to perform. This task must not be confused with sterile agitation about incidents in the “political life” of capitalism. It lies instead in showing that the system always operates against the workers; that they cannot resolve their problems without abolishing capitalism and the bureaucracy and totally reconstructing society; that there is a profound and intimate similarity between their fate as producers in the workplace and their fate as people in society, in the sense that neither one nor the other can be modified without the division between a class of directors and a class of executants being suppressed. Only through long and patient work in this direction can the problem of how to mobilize the workers around general questions be posed again in correct terms.

9. Experience has proved that internationalism is not an automatic product of working-class life. Formerly it had been developed into a real political factor by the actions of working-class organizations, but it disappeared when the latter degenerated and lapsed into chauvinism.

The revolutionary movement will have to struggle to help the proletariat retrace the long path down which it has been descending for the past quarter century. It will have to breathe life back into the international solidarity of labor struggles and especially into the solidarity of workers in imperialist countries with the struggles of colonized peoples.

10. The revolutionary movement must cease to appear as a political movement in the traditional sense of the term. Traditional politics is dead, and for good reasons. The population has abandoned it because it sees it for what it is in social reality: the activity of a stratum of professional mystifiers hovering around the State machinery and its appendages in order to penetrate into them or take them over. The revolutionary movement ought to appear as what it really is: a total movement concerned with everything people do and are subject to in society, and above all with their real daily life.

11. The revolutionary movement ought therefore to cease being an organization of specialists. It ought to become the place—the only place in present-day society outside the workplace—where a growing number of individuals relearn how to live a truly collective life, manage their own affairs, and realize and develop themselves while working in mutual recognition for a common objective.

12. The propaganda and recruitment efforts of the revolutionary movement henceforth must take into account the transformations in the structure of capitalist society and the generalization of its state of crisis. The class divisions of this society are more and more becoming the division between directors and executants. The immense majority of individuals, whatever their qualifications or level of pay, have been transformed into wage-earning executants who carry out compartmentalized tasks. They feel the alienation in their work as well as the absurdity of the system, and they tend to revolt against it. Office staff and office workers as well as people in so-called tertiary occupations are becoming less and less distinguishable from manual laborers and are beginning to struggle against the system along the same lines. Similarly, the crisis of culture and the

decomposition of values in capitalist society are driving large sections of intellectuals and students (whose numerical weight, indeed, is growing) toward a radical critique of the system.

The revolutionary movement alone can give a positive meaning and provide a positive outcome to the revolt of these strata. And in return, the movement will be greatly enriched by them. Under the conditions of an exploitative society, the revolutionary movement alone can serve as the link between manual workers, "tertiary" employees, and intellectuals. Without this linkup there can be no victory for the revolution.

13. The rupture between generations and the youth revolt in modern society are not comparable to the "generational conflicts" of former times. Youth no longer oppose adults as part of a strategy to take their place in an accepted and established system. They reject this system. They no longer recognize its values. Contemporary society is losing its hold over the generations it produces. This rupture is especially brutal when it comes to politics.

On the one hand, the overwhelming majority of adult cadres and labor militants cannot regear themselves to the changing situation, no matter how hard they try or how sincere they may be. They mechanically repeat the lessons and phrases learned long ago, even though these ideas have become devoid of meaning. They remain attached to forms of action and organization that are in the process of collapsing. Conversely, traditional organizations are succeeding less and less in recruiting youth. In the eyes of young people, nothing separates these organization from all the stupid, worm-eaten pomposity they meet with when they come into the social world.

The revolutionary movement will be able to give a positive direction to the immense revolt of youth today. It will make of it the leaven for social transformation if it can find the new and genuine language for which youth is searching and if it can show young people an effective form of action and struggle against a world they reject.

The crisis and wearing down of the capitalist system today extends to all sectors of life. Its leaders tire themselves out attempting to plug the leaks in the system without ever succeeding in doing so. In this society, the richest and most powerful the world has ever known, people's dissatisfaction and their impotence in the face of their own creations are greater than ever.

Today capitalism may succeed in privatizing workers, in driving them away from dealing with their social problems and from acting collectively. But this phase cannot last forever if only because established society will put a stop to it first. Sooner or later, due to one of those inevitable "accidents" that takes place under the present system, the masses will enter into action again to change the conditions of their existence. The fate of this action will depend upon the degree of consciousness, of initiative, of will, and of the capacity for autonomy that workers will then exhibit.

But the development of this awareness and the consolidation of this autonomy depend to a decisive degree on the continuing work of a revolutionary organization. This organization must have a clear understanding of the experience of a century of working-class struggles. Above all, it must understand that both

the end and the means of all revolutionary activity are the development of the workers' conscious and autonomous action. It must be capable of tracing out the perspective of a new human society for which it is worth living and dying. Finally, it must itself embody the example of a collective activity that people can both understand and dominate.

### Notes

1. L. Trotsky, Author's 1924 Introduction to *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1945), vol. 1, p. 9.

2. See, for example, C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956). See also Adlai Stevenson's article in *Foreign Affairs* (January 1961), p. 191, of which excerpts were published in *S. ou B.*, 30 (April 1960), p. 97.

3. See Jean-François Lyotard's articles, "L'Etat et la politique dans la France de 1960," in *S. ou B.*, 30 (April 1960), and "Le Gaullisme et l'Algérie," in the present issue (31).

4. The massive electoral support given De Gaulle in September and then in November 1958 does not contradict this interpretation. It is, on the contrary, its most striking confirmation. It signifies the following: "Go take power, make yourself head of State and of the country, just so long as we don't have to be bothered with it."

5. One will be able to see that this analysis leads to conclusions that break with traditional ideas, both in the domain of theory in its most general sense and in revolutionary political practice. If the reader has the desire, he can verify that this break, starting off from a reflection on the world around us, overlaps with and extends the conclusions of analyses that have been undertaken for years within the *S. ou B.* group, starting off from other events or from theoretical preoccupations. See, in particular, the texts *DC* (no. 12 [August 1953], especially pp. 1-8), *CS I-III*, "Bilan, perspectives, tâches" (no. 21 [March 1957; now in *EMO I*, pp. 383-408]) and *PO I* and *II*.

6. The most important elements of such an explanation will be given later. But in any case it is impossible to take up here the analyses that this text will spell out in subsequent issues and that it takes as its presuppositions. Nor can we elaborate here all these ideas in detail. We are planning to publish studies in subsequent issues of *S. ou B.* that will be aimed at supplementing and corroborating the conclusions of this text, in particular those on the modern capitalist economy, on the crisis of traditional Marxist ideology, on the crisis in the motivations and the values of contemporary society, on the meaning of workers' struggles in production, etc.

7. The rising level of needs and the ever-precarious financial situation of most wage earners mean that despite unemployment benefits (in general, a pittance) the condition of the unemployed is as intolerable today as it ever was. As for the substance of the matter, we can say, paraphrasing Péguy, that any society in which a single individual is involuntarily unemployed is absurd.

8. It is another thing that automation already is being used to discipline workers through the threat of unemployment or to worsen their situation in the labor process.

9. In France, due to a series of well-known specific factors (the Algerian War and the progressive decomposition of the capitalist management of the economy, especially since 1956), this process was interrupted and even reversed between 1957 and 1959. But it will resume its course in the years to come.

10. Consumer credit has recently been introduced in the USSR, "with immediate success" (*Financial Times*, September 17, 1959). More generally, let us point out that the significance of the phenomena we are describing extends beyond Western societies. They will apply to the bureaucratic countries in the East as these countries "grow" and "develop." The bureaucratization of Western politics and the total irresponsibility of Western "statesmen" proceed in parallel with the "liberalization" of the regimes in the East. The two systems are converging. It is no longer just their underlying reality that is identical. Even the appearances tend to become so.

11. This does not mean that the working class is becoming "bourgeois," as sundry sociologists like A. Touraine (see *Arguments*, 12-13 [January-March, 1959]) have tried to argue. Working-class life today differs both from working-class life in former times and from the life of the privileged classes today. Money problems remain a permanent concern for families with moderate incomes. In



fact, these difficulties often increase, parallel with the increasing standard of living, which constantly imposes new “needs” and new expenses. At the other end of the social scale, there are still classes for whom the satisfaction of physical needs creates no problems whatsoever. There are, nevertheless, differences between the *material structure* of consumption today and what it was only a few decades ago. This structure is continually evolving. It undergoes changes that are not spontaneous, but rather organized and intentional. As the mass market annexes goods formerly reserved for the “upper” classes, these classes now indulge in new patterns of consumption (see for instance Vance Packard’s *The Status Seekers* [New York: McKay, 1959], pp. 315-19). This last trend (Anglo-Saxon economists call it the “dependence effect”) is a powerful ingredient among the indispensable consumer-based stimulants of the modern capitalist economy.

12. T/E: That is to say, Martian instead of Marxian.

13. See C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*.

14. In the following pages what we call “traditional Marxism” is *not* the complete, systematic, and “pure” doctrine that might be extracted from the works of Karl Marx himself. By “traditional Marxism” we mean what has been, in its historical reality, the theory and ideology of the Marxist movement. These are the ideas that have prevailed in practice, whether they passed as the ideas of Marx or not, and whether they were in fact his ideas or not. They are the ideas that have influenced the organized labor movement. The historical reality of Christian ideology must be sought more in *The Imitation of Christ* or in *The Lives of the Saints* than in the Gospels, St. Clement of Alexandria, or St. Augustine. Similarly, the historical reality of Marxism, the ideology that in fact molded millions of militants, is to be found in thousands of pamphlets and newspaper articles, in Kautsky’s great works of vulgarization, in Bukharin’s *The ABC of Communism*, or even in the *Karl Marx* of Lenin. It is not to be found in *Capital*, which very few people have read, and still less in the manuscripts of Marx’s youth, published for the first time in 1925. This practical ideology of Marxism, despite its schematization and oversimplification, follows faithfully enough one side of the work of Marx, which gradually became the most important one, even in the eyes of Marx himself. We will see later on how this process of selection came about when we comment on Marx’s *Capital*. Indeed, as this very discussion shows, *there is no systematic doctrine* to be derived out of Marx’s work, for his work contains some thoroughly contradictory features. We will examine this aspect of the problem at the end of this text.

15. The answers one does find are both fragmentary and contradictory. The question was never treated as such by the classical authors. In Marx’s own writings one finds certain passages, especially ones written in his youth describing the condition of the proletariat as a total condition affecting all phases of its existence, and emphasizing the tendency of the working class to transcend the inhumanity of its life by changing society as a whole. But one also finds as a predominant idea in his “mature” works the notion of economic mechanisms inexorably driving the workers to revolt. This is expressed most clearly in the well-known passage dealing with primitive accumulation. Kautsky’s position, echoed by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done*, is well known. The proletariat enters into political activity only under the influence of propaganda made by petty bourgeois intellectuals. We can find, however, many quotations where Lenin himself contradicts himself on this question. As for Trotsky, he defines scientific socialism, in his *In Defense of Marxism*, as “the conscious expression of the elemental and instinctive drive of the proletariat to reconstruct society on communist foundations.” A beautiful phrase . . . but one that obscures the problem by applying metaphorical terms (such as “elemental” and “instinctive”) to what are, in the proletariat, products of historical development and struggle. [See *HMO/HWM*.]

16. In both cases—the period of reconstruction, the Algerian War—the attempt to go from the level of economic demands to the political level failed. But we can say that in both cases this failure was due to properly political factors. These factors had to do with the proletariat and its relationships with bureaucratic organizations. As such, they *could have been* overcome.

17. The financing of the Algerian War, on the order of more than 1 trillion old francs a year, or 4 percent of the French GNP, ought not to create insurmountable problems for a country whose GNP is *increasing* by 4 or 5 percent *per year*. It is one thing to say that even one franc spent for this war is one franc too many, and that this money is taken out of the pay of wage earners; it is another thing to say or insinuate, as the “Left” constantly does, that the war won’t be able to go on for fi-

nancial reasons or that it only can go on by continually reducing the standard of living of the wage-earning population.

18. In what follows, we no longer are talking about traditional Marxism but about Marx himself.

19. At best, for capitalists always are trying to reduce the workers' standard of living (they are obliged to by the logic of the system). And since (as far as the exposition in *Capital* is concerned) there is no factor ready to oppose this reduction in the standard of living—except at the point where further reduction would render it impossible for the proletariat to survive in sufficient numbers—capitalists succeed in doing so. This is the meaning of “absolute pauperization.”

20. Although we can still find in Marx the remnants of Ricardo's view (that there is reciprocal interaction between wages and the labor supply in such a way that wage fluctuations above or below the physiological minimum raises or lowers the rate of survival of generations of laborers), overpopulation among laboring people is for Marx essentially a product of capitalism itself, since the latter constantly replaces workers with machines. We will talk about this later on.

21. Marx says so in so many words: “Labor power, therefore, is a commodity, *neither more nor less* than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scales” (“Wage Labor and Capital,” *MESW*, p. 73, emphasis added). [T/E: We follow the *Solidarity* footnote and text here. The original text read “like an animal, a combustible fuel or a mineral” and no note accompanied the text.]

22. Even this is not completely accurate, for even the individual worker's struggle at the point of production has a significant influence upon actual pay rates. Cf. *CS III*, especially the section entitled “The Struggle Over Output.”

23. Rosa Luxemburg reached this last conclusion following a different line of reasoning that we cannot go into here. Let us add just one point. Great discussion has racked the Marxist movement over whether capitalist crises were the result of “overproduction” or “underconsumption.” At one time, the term “underconsumptionist” was one of the worst insults that could be hurled at anyone, short of demanding immediate expulsion. This distinction is purely theological. “Overproduction” and “underconsumption” reciprocally imply one another. There is no overproduction except in relation to a given level of solvent demand. There is no deficiency in demand except in relation to a given level of production.

24. Discussion of this last possibility in our text entitled “La Consolidation temporaire du capitalisme mondial” (in *S. ou B.*, 3 [July 1949], pp. 60–61 [now in *CMR I*, pp. 266–68]) took place within the traditional outlook and as such is in part inadequate and in part incorrect.

25. The proportionality implied in the text between the rate of accumulation and the rate of productivity increases is, strictly speaking, a hypothesis for simplifying the discussion. It corresponds closely, however, to observed facts. It is a hypothesis that is empirically verified, both on the average and in the long run.

26. Other means are also used, such as monetary policy, regulation of credit to keep it in line with consumption, etc. But none works as well as budget policy. We should point out that the importance of State expenditure as a means of balancing the economy was recognized by Marxists long before Keynes and the advent of “deficit spending.” It has always been admitted that arms expenditures can bring capitalism out of a depression, and they have been used for this purpose. But nothing shows the degree of self-mystification to which the Marxist movement has been led better than the reduction of this correct idea into a fetishism about armaments. If arms expenditures can pull capitalism out of a depression, why cannot money for building roads do it? The relative fact that under certain conditions capitalists will prefer building arms to other possible types of expenditures has been erected into absolute magic. As if the manufacture of weapons would have a curative effect on depressions that other types of State expenditures would not! [T/E: “Deficit spending” appears here in English.]

27. We must recall here that some Marxists who consider the USSR to be “State capitalist” have long searched for the equivalent of economic depressions and of an industrial reserve army there. Some believed that they had discovered the latter in the phenomenon of the concentration camps. To hear them tell it, Stalin gathered together in the camps all the surplus working population that could not be employed in production. [T/E: The *Solidarity* version of this note attributes this view to Raya Dunayevskaya.]

28. See *DC* in *S. ou B.* 12 (August 1953) [and the first part of the appendix to this text].

29. See the analysis of this contradiction in *CS III* (*S. ou B.*, 23 [January 1958]), in particular, pp. 84ff. and 117ff. [Now in *EMO* 2, pp. 15ff. and 71ff. T/E: See the sections entitled "The Contradictions of the Capitalist Organization of the Enterprise" and "The Workers' Struggle against Alienation" in *CS III*.]

30. Marx himself did not succeed in breaking free from this outlook. The theory of wages expounded in *Capital* explicitly appeals to the "moral and historical element" that determines the working class's standard of living, hence the sum total of goods the worker needs to survive and reproduce, hence the "value of labor power," of which wages are the monetary expression.

31. See a description of this war in the texts by Paul Romano (*S. ou B.*, 1-6 [March 1949 to March 1950]), Georges Vivier (nos. 11-12 and 14-17), Daniel Mothé (22 [July 1957]), and the second of the sections of *CS III* cited in note 29. [T/E: See the Bibliography for the original American version of Romano's text.]

32. Georg Lukács was the minister of culture in the Hungarian Soviet Republic of Béla Kun, in 1919. His *History and Class Consciousness*, the "cursed book" of Marxism, consists of a series of essays written between 1919 and 1922 and first published in Berlin in 1923. They were immediately denounced as "unorthodox" both by the Communist International and by the Social Democrat Kautsky, whose common "positivist" conceptions the book dared to question. Lukács recanted. After the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, Lukács lived in Berlin and Vienna. When the Nazis came to power he sought refuge in Moscow. He returned to Hungary in 1945, as professor of aesthetics at Budapest University, where his writings on literature and philosophy again incurred official displeasure. In 1949 he was denounced for "cosmopolitanism" and indulged in a public "self-criticism." The year 1956 found Lukács one of the main intellectual instigators of the revolution. In October, he again became minister of culture, this time in the short-lived Nagy government. After the second Russian intervention in Budapest he was arrested, refused to recant, and was later deported to Romania. He subsequently returned to Hungary. (*Solidarity* footnote)

33. This obviously does not mean that this consciousness is "perfect," let alone that every modification of the system is clearly seen and willed.

34. See *CS III*.

35. And for long afterward. Even now, faced with the introduction of "automation," the attitude of the workers clearly shows that they perceive it as an *attack*.

36. See the texts on strikes in England and the United States published in nos. 18, 19, 26, 29, and 30 of *S. ou B.* [Cf. *EMO* 1, pp. 279-380. T/E: See the first three articles in the present volume.]

37. See *CS III*.

38. See in particular Daniel Mothé's "L'Usine et la gestion ouvrière," in *S. ou B.*, 22 (July 1957), pp. 74-111.

39. See the texts on the strikes in England and the United States cited in note 36.

40. We start out with this facet for clarity of exposition. For us, ideology does not "follow" or "precede," it is neither cause nor effect. Both identical and different, it simply is the expression of the *same* social reality at its own level.

41. The question of the degree, nature, and social bases of support for this awareness is far from simple, but we cannot linger on this point right now.

42. [1965: "As the capitalists are compelled . . . to exploit the already existing gigantic means of production on a larger scale and to set in motion all the mainsprings of credit to this end, there is a corresponding increase in industrial earthquakes . . . in a word, crises increase. They become more frequent and more violent" (K. Marx, "Wage Labor and Capital," *MESW*, p. 94).]

43. In this regard there has always been a certain duplicity in the Marxist movement between practice—where it was proclaimed that this or that company or sector of the capitalist sector could and should pay higher wages—and the overall theory, where it was "demonstrated" that workers' wage demands could not be satisfied within the framework of the present system.

44. This is proved by the tremendous resistance "modern" capitalist policies encounter within the capitalist class even today. The policies of the Eisenhower administration, which plunged the American economy into a morass and kept it there for seven years, give a partial expression of this resistance to ideological modernization. The same can be said of Baumgartner's policy in France, which allowed French capitalism to progress only at a snail's pace under the pretext of safeguarding

“price stability.” But this is even truer of 99 percent of Marxists today. They are far behind the most class-conscious representatives of capitalism. When pressed a little they reveal that their image of capitalism is a nineteenth-century one.

45. These very clearly were the stakes in the last great U.S. steel strike. See the notes on this subject in nos. 29 and 30 of *S. ou B.*

46. This transformation, which took almost a century in other capitalist countries, took place within the space of a few years in the United States. It started there around 1935-37, when the great wave of strikes forced the bosses to recognize the CIO. By the end of World War II, the transformation already was complete. From then on the unions were preoccupied basically with how to maintain labor discipline within production in exchange for wage concessions.

47. See, for example, the 1947 American Full Employment Act and, more generally, any and all official programmatic statements made by contemporary governments on economic matters.

48. No one denies that the private capitalist still exists in the West and that he continues to play an important role. But the key point—which the holders of traditional conceptions are incapable of seeing—is that where the big capitalist still exists, he can play his role in business only by being situated at the summit of a bureaucratic pyramid and by working through the intermediary of this pyramid.

49. See *PO I.*

50. This goes even for Stalinist organizations. In the last analysis, their coming to power signifies merely a huge rearrangement of the *forms* of exploitation, the better to preserve its substance.

51. See Daniel Mothé’s “Les Ouvriers et la culture,” in *S. ou B.*, 30 (April 1960), pp. 1-44.

52. See, for example, W. H. Whyte’s *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).

53. On the bureaucracy in the production process, see *CS III.* On the political bureaucracy, see “La Voie polonaise de la bureaucratisation,” in *S. ou B.*, 21 (March 1957), pp. 59-76 [*SB 2*, pp. 339-72; T/E: “The Polish Road to Bureaucratization,” written by Pierre Chaulieu (i.e., Castoriadis), is not included in the present edition] and *PO I.*

54. Beginning with Marx’s analysis of capitalism as rationalization, Max Weber was the first to have shown the intimate kinship between rationalization and bureaucracy, and he pointed out that the future of capitalism was to be found in bureaucracy, the “rational” system of management par excellence. The fundamental lacuna in his analysis is to be found in the fact that, for him, this “rationalization” is rationalization without quotation marks. In other words, he thought it could escape its internal contradictions. See the final chapters of his great work, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.*

55. See *CS III.*

56. T/E: “The first part of this text” refers to *MRCM/MCR I.*

57. This basic fact is recognized by capitalist managers who don’t mince words. Here, for example, is how the *Financial Times* (November 7, 1960) summed up a book (*Exploration in Management*, New York: Wiley, 1960) written by Mr. Wilfred Brown, for twenty years chairman of Glacier Metal Company: “Basically, Mr. Brown has been concerned with the divergence between the formal executive structure of his company (from Chairman right down to shop floor) and the actual pattern of policy and decision-making as it in fact exists. . . . In one sense, his concern is with what, in common terms, might be called ‘going over the heads,’ or ‘going behind the back’ of others. It is a sign of the thoroughness of Mr. Brown’s analysis that he has come point blank up against, and recognized without being able to remedy, what he calls ‘the split at the bottom of the executive chain.’ Here is a frank recognition by a businessman, arrived at by independent investigation, of the classic Marxist concept of the ‘alienation of the worker.’ That this is still the biggest problem left to solve in British industry (indeed by British society) is amply shown by the concern shown in many quarters at the number of unofficial strikes.”

58. See, for example, Georges Friedmann, *The Anatomy of Work: Labor, Leisure, and the Implications of Automation*, trans. Wyatt Rawson (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

59. A manager of International Harvester, reported in the *New York Herald Tribune*, June 5, 1961.

60. Cf. *CS III.*

61. Mr. Mendès-France’s elegant phrase for this preoccupation with workers’ struggles which

has seized hold of modern employers is “the haunting obsession [*hantisse*] of inflation” (*L'Express*, September 22, 1960), p. 4.

62. These are not exclusively Anglo-Saxon ailments. In Germany, the influx of refugee labor and the docility of the workers allowed postwar capitalism to expand at a very rapid rate. But this period is coming to an end: For the past two years continued full employment has been undermining discipline in production (see “Fin du miracle allemande?” in *S. ou B.*, 30 [April 1960]). It has created a situation wherein wage hikes are much greater than productivity increases (+12% for the former, +6% for the latter in the first three quarters of 1960 and 1961). By chance, the German political miracle and the Adenauer dictatorship also are reaching their end at the very moment when German capitalism has to begin facing up to the contradiction between continued expansion and the maintenance of “labor discipline.” [T/E: The *Solidarity* editions cite +30% wage hikes and +26% productivity increases for the years 1959-63.]

63. See, for example, the excerpts from the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* in *S. ou B.*, 29 (December 1959), p. 108, and 30 (April 1960), p. 94.

64. See *CS III*; PRAB; Claude Lefort, “Le Totalitarisme sans Staline,” *S. ou B.*, 19 (July 1956), pp. 46-68 [now in *Elements*, pp. 166-86 of the 1971 edition; T/E: and pp. 203-30 of the 1979 edition]; and, above, section V of this text.

65. See Claude Lefort, “Retour de Pologne,” in *S. ou B.*, 21 (March 1957), pp. 15-58 [now in *Elements*, 1971, pp. 221-59; T/E: reprinted in his *L'Invention démocratique* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), pp. 273-332] and my text “La Voie polonaise de la bureaucratisation,” pp. 59-76 [now in *SB 2*, pp. 339-72; T/E: this last text is not included in the present edition].

66. We have spoken on several occasions in *S. ou B.* of strikes in England and the United States, and of the shop stewards' movement (nos. 18, 19, 26, 29, 30, and 32). Let us cite an extreme case, that of the Briggs factories at Dagenham (belonging to Ford England) where there were 289 work stoppages between February 1954 and May 1955, and 234 work stoppages between August 1955 and March 1957. Most of these stoppages were “unofficial” and lasted only a few hours or a few days. Practically all of them concerned conflicts over production conditions and conditions of life in the factory: supply of work clothes; congested lines of communication and unsatisfactory management of tool and parts supplies; security measures; heating and ventilation; workers' approval in decisions concerning the placement of machinery; personnel policy and layoffs; standardization of parts and work methods; night work; alteration of work teams without previous consultation of the shop stewards; provocative attitudes on the part of foremen; management's attitude toward unions and labor representatives. See Lord Cameron's report, *Report of a Court of Inquiry . . .* (London, HMSO Command 131, 1957). Although extreme, the case of the Briggs plants is nevertheless typical in the sense that we can see here in a condensed version the situation that exists in more scattered form throughout British industry. The same thing goes for England as a whole in relation to other modern capitalist countries; we see here, in an enlarged format, what is happening everywhere, and above all, what *will* happen more and more everywhere. To concentrate on the English experience today is no different from concentrating on the experience of the Commune, after 1871, or that of Russia, after 1917.

67. The largest workers' struggles in the United States over the past few years have taken place over work conditions and the conditions of life in the workplace: The auto workers' revolt in 1955 against the CIO trade-union bureaucracy (see *S. ou B.*, 18 [January 1956], pp. 48-60 [T/E: “Wildcat Strikes in the Automobile Industry,” this volume]); the steel strike of 1959-60 (see nos. 29 [December 1959], p. 111, and 30 [April 1960], pp. 94-96); finally, the auto strikes in the autumn of 1961, where the agreement between management and the union bosses, which had been reached only with great difficulty, was brought back into question because it had “forgotten” “local problems,” i.e., work conditions; an explosion of wildcat strikes that lasted fifteen days brought them back to reality, and the workers obtained pretty much what they had been demanding.

68. See *CS III*.

69. We hope the reader will have understood that in the foregoing discussion we have not spoken of socialization as a formal concept. We have been referring instead to the content of the process of socialization. A movie hall and a workers' council may represent two types of socialization. The sociologist who cannot see the absolute opposition between these two kinds of social integration and

the difference in their effects on the dynamic of society, only demonstrates to what lengths of vacuousness and gratuitousness an increasingly formalist “science” can go.

70. See *PO I*.

71. T/E: The SFIO was the Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière, the forerunner of today’s French Socialist party.

72. This applies even more, although in a different way, in the case of Communist sympathizers. For them, it is a question of Russia “catching up with and overtaking the United States.” This objective requires neither their action or participation. It is fulfilled by carrying out five-year or twenty-year plans. Similarly, the final worldwide victory of this type of “socialism” depends not on what they do but on the quantity and quality of Russian missiles.

73. Once again, we are not forgetting that nothing can be consumed that does not come from society and return to it, that does not presuppose social activity in order to be acquired as well as to be produced, and that does not raise at least implicitly the problem of the workings of society. The TV viewer, isolated at home, is thrust into contact with the world as soon as he pushes a button. The driver stuck in a traffic jam is literally drowned in an ocean of individuals and social objects. *But with these individuals and these objects, there is no positive social relation.*

74. It is not a question of transcending history and the human condition, of “all conflict and all sorrow,” but rather of abolishing those specific forms of servitude of man to man, or of man to those of his own creations which are called exploitation, hierarchy, the absurdity of work, the inertia and opacity of institutions.

75. Trotsky said that in a well-off family no one fights over jam. A fallacious metaphor. In rich families there not only are minor disputes, people kill each other over other kinds of jam (in fact rather more often than in poor families). All Trotsky’s arguments in this area were unduly—though understandably—influenced by Russia’s experience of poverty and famine from 1917 to 1923. This experience is in no way typical. We are not saying that socialism is a matter of an internal, personal conversion. We are saying rather that people’s attitudes toward the distribution of goods and toward needs are cultural, social, and historical facts.

76. The theory that workers are “educated” through the failures of a bureaucratic leadership (an idea behind many of Trotsky’s writings in the 1930s) has a very limited validity. It is only true during a revolutionary phase (as was the case when the masses of Petrograd underwent such an apprenticeship between February and October 1917), or for a minority section of the working class. Many French workers lived through the upheavals of 1936, but how many of them today draw the same conclusions as a revolutionary organization would? If one considers only explicit and subjective experiences as relevant, then we must conclude that the principal result of unsuccessful struggles is demoralization.

77. But only at the beginning. For, almost always, this vanguard, which has drawn its conclusions based upon events in the previous epoch, has a great deal of trouble sticking to them. What was its strength becomes its weakness. Provided that the revolution continues, the activity of the masses rapidly tends to outstrip such conclusions. This statement only reinforces the standpoint expressed in the text.

78. See *SB*, in no. 1 of *S. ou B.*, in particular, pp. 39-46 [now in *SB I*, pp. 175-83; T/E: see section III, “Proletariat and Revolution” in *SB*]; also, “Les Ouvriers face à la bureaucratie,” *S. ou B.* no. 18, pp. 75-86 [now in *EMO I*, pp. 333-55; T/E: see this volume, “Workers Confront the Bureaucracy”].

79. Consumption no longer has provided a sufficient stimulus to economic expansion in the United States since 1955. There is a relative saturation of demand for “durable goods,” which was the great driving force behind expansion in the previous era. This shows that there are limits, even at present, to the “indefinite” extension of material consumption and to the manipulation of consumers, even using the most highly developed techniques in the world. But it would be premature and dangerous to draw from this any definite conclusions.

a) On this question, see now *HMO* in *EMO I*, in particular, pp. 66-114. [T/E: The pages cited correspond to pp. 23-42 of the *Telos* translation, 30 (Winter, 1976-77), “The History of the Workers Movement.” A version of this article is to appear in the third volume of the present series.]

b) [T/E: The last sentence of this paragraph and the accompanying lettered note read as follows:] Two notes appended to this text—“On Revolutionary Theory” and “On The Theory of His-

tory”—are aimed at explicating the general orientation of such a transformation. These two notes—the first one of which was circulated within the *S. ou B.* group in 1959—later became “Marxism and Revolutionary Theory,” which was published in nos. 36-40 of *S. ou B.* and is now reprinted in *IIS*.

c) These population figures obviously pertain to the end of the 1950s.

d) See “Author’s Introduction to the 1974 English Edition.”

e) I again took up the discussion of the problems to which the rest of this chapter is devoted in *HMO*. [T/E: Castoriadis again cites pp. 66-114 of the *EMO I* text. See note (a).]

## Appendix to the First English Edition

### *The “Falling Rate of Profit”*

Marx’s analysis of the capitalist economy is based on three fundamental concepts (categories):

$C$ , constant capital (the produced means of production).

$V$ , variable capital (wages).

$S$ , surplus value (the excess of the net product over the wage bill—or of the gross product over the wage bill *and* constant capital used up in production).

We will assume that these concepts are familiar to the reader and will consider (as Marx does in volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*) the *total* capitalist economy, after “consolidation” of interfirm and intersector transactions and accounts. Under these circumstances  $S$  (total surplus value) is equal to the mass of profits;  $V$  is the mass of wages or total wage bill. The position of  $C$  is more complex, as the symbol was used by Marx to denote different categories, in different parts of *Capital*. In volumes 2 and 3 it refers to the value of *total capital stock*, whereas in volume 1 it denotes the *depreciation of fixed capital* embodied in the value of an individual product or of a firm’s output, plus the value of the “nondurable” producer’s goods used up in production (raw materials, fuel, etc.). It is obvious that one should be most careful, in each instance, in defining the exact sense in which one is using  $C$ , and in indicating which meaning is relevant in any particular context. This we will attempt to do, using more accurate formulations where necessary.

Marx considers the relations of  $C$ ,  $V$ , and  $S$  and formulates three “laws” that govern the development of these relations over a period of time.

1.  $\frac{S}{V}$  (the ratio of surplus value to variable capital or of total profits to total wage bill), Marx calls the rate of exploitation. This is an unambiguous concept. *Marx thought that the rate of exploitation necessarily increased with time* (he speaks, of course, as we shall do too throughout here, about long-term trends, not local or short-term variations). According to Marx the rate of exploitation rises because the productivity of labor increases constantly under capitalism—an obvious fact. This means that the *unit value* (in terms of labor, of course, as in all this reasoning) of commodities constantly falls as time goes by. But then so does the unit value of the commodities entering the “consumption basket” of a worker or of a working-class family. In physical terms, this consumption basket is taken by Marx to remain constant over time—i.e., the real standard of living of the working class is assumed to remain stagnant. So its value falls over time—since it is the product of a constant quantity of commodities multiplied by falling unit values. In physical terms, an hour of work is paid the same amount, though its *output* increases with productivity. In value terms, an hour of work by definition always produces the same *value*, but the value of the commodities with which it is paid falls (because unit values fall with rising productivity). Workers get a con-



stant amount of a rising total (in physical terms) or a falling amount of a constant total (in value terms). Their share therefore declines, and, conversely, the remainder (the share of the capitalists) rises.

The *reasoning* is correct, but it stands or falls with the assumption that the real standard of living of the working class is constant over time. In Marxist language this is expressed by saying that labor power needs a fixed quantity of inputs (consumption basket of the working-class family) to be produced and reproduced, and that market laws prevent the “price” of labor power (wages) from being lastingly above or below the “value” of labor power (the value equivalent of this fixed physical quantity of consumption goods). We have shown in the main text that this is not so. Labor power is *not* just a commodity. Working-class struggles *have* succeeded in raising, over a period of time, the standard of living of the workers, or the “value” of labor power. We will not return to this point here.

2.  $\frac{C}{V}$  (the ratio of constant capital to variable capital), Marx calls the organic composition of capital. *Marx believed this ratio would also constantly increase throughout the history of capitalism.* He based himself upon the obvious fact that the same number of workers handle an ever-increasing number of machines, an ever-increasing quantity of raw materials, etc.

But this ratio, or rather Marx’s way of expressing it, is ambiguous. It is clear that if we have an acceptable way of measuring the *physical volume* of produced means of production and compare it with the *number of men* (or the total input of hours of work), then mechanization and rising productivity mean ipso facto that the first rises much faster than the second. (We can easily dismiss pedantic statisticians who would try to point out that this measuring of the physical volume of capital amounts to weighing together sugar and coal.) But in Marx’s formula there is neither physical volume of produced means of production nor number of men. If  $C$  is annual depreciation and  $V$  is the wage bill or variable capital, *both are expressed in value terms.* The obvious fact that more and more machines are handled by fewer and fewer men does not allow us to infer, without further consideration, that annual depreciation in value terms is constantly increasing as against the annual wage bill, also expressed in value terms. Neither can these two terms be taken as correct indices of the behavior of the corresponding physical quantities. The *capital* to which the “ever-increasing number of machines,” etc., refers is *not* annual depreciation (used-up capital) but is total capital stock (capital physically present in the production process). To eliminate this ambiguity let  $K$  be an index of the volume of this total capital, and  $L$  total labor (total hours worked). The empirical, and important, fact is that  $\frac{K}{L}$  increases with time. Various specific assumptions are needed to pass from this to the idea that  $\frac{C}{V}$  also increases with time.

Let us call  $r$  the percentage of annual depreciation,  $w$  the real wage per hour of work, and  $U$  the unit value (i.e., the reciprocal of the net productivity of labor or hours worked per unit volume of net output). Let us assume that the unit

values of capital goods and consumer goods change *pari passu*, i.e., that the productivity of labor in capital goods and consumer goods industries increases at the same rate through time; in other words,  $\frac{U_1(t)}{U_2(t)} = \text{constant} (= a, \text{ let us say})$ .

Then  $C$  = annual depreciation in value terms =  $rKU_1(t)$ , and  $V$  = total wages in value terms =  $wLU_2(t)$ . The organic composition of capital, in Marx's sense, is then  $\frac{rKU_1(t)}{wLU_2(t)}$ , or  $\frac{rKa}{wL}$ .  $\frac{Ka}{L}$  is clearly rising, but what about  $\frac{rKa}{wL}$ ?<sup>1</sup>

Obviously this depends essentially on the behavior of  $w$ , the real wage (there is no *prima facie* case for supposing a systematic variation of  $r$ , the depreciation rate, with time). On Marx's hypothesis that  $w$  is stagnant, "organic composition" (in this sense) will rise. But in fact, where  $w$  and  $K$  rise approximately *pari passu*, organic composition in value terms will remain roughly constant—as indeed it more or less does—whether we consider  $\frac{rK}{wL}$  (annual depreciation over wage bill) or  $\frac{K}{wL}$  (fixed capital over wage bill).

If we take  $C$  in its alternative sense to mean depreciation plus the value of raw materials, etc., the argument becomes a little more involved, although in substance it remains the same. It is clearly a fact that the "same number of men" manipulate an ever-increasing quantity of materials, etc. This is tantamount to saying that physical productivity of labor rises. But  $\frac{C}{V}$  is expressed in *value* terms. The rise in productivity that *increases the amount* of materials manipulated will, if the whole of the economy is considered, *reduce their unit value* in exactly the same proportions. So the numerator of the fraction remains constant, in value terms. The behavior of the fraction will therefore depend on what happens to the denominator,  $V$ . If this is falling, because as Marx thought, real wages stagnate (and therefore wages, expressed in value terms, fall), then the "organic composition" will increase by that amount. But if, as in reality, real wages rise more or less *pari passu* with productivity, then "organic composition" is stable. We have not taken into account this aspect of the argument in the main text because, as explained in the second and final section of this appendix, raw materials, etc., do *not* appear in a consolidated account of the total economy.

3. Finally, Marx calls rate of profit the ratio  $\frac{S}{(C + V)}$ . *He thought there must be a long-term tendency* (itself the result of many counteracting factors, which he mentions) *for the rate of profit to fall*. The central argument is that  $C$  (constant capital) rises much more rapidly than  $V$  (variable capital)—because of the "rising organic composition of capital." Now  $S$  is extracted out of living labor, and even if the rate of exploitation is rising, it is implicitly assumed that it cannot rise so fast as to compensate for the fact that  $V$  is smaller and smaller in relation to  $C$ . So, according to Marx, the denominator ( $C + V$ ) rises faster than the numerator  $S$ ; and the ratio  $\frac{S}{(C + V)}$  (expressing the rate of profit) should decline as time goes by.

*The last argument is (a) logically inconsistent, (b) empirically wrong, and (c) economically and politically irrelevant.* Let us deal with these statements one by one.

A. The rate of profit is not and cannot be reckoned as the ratio of profit to depreciation + wages. The rate of profit is profit over *capital*, that is, profit over value of total fixed capital + value of raw materials, etc., *necessary to start production* (and *not*: manipulated in the course of the accounting period) + the value of wages *necessary to start production* (and *not*: paid in the course of the accounting period).  $C + V$  is both too little and too much to express this: It is too little because  $C$  (depreciation) is only a small part of capital. ( $KU_1[t]$ , according to the previous notations, should be taken instead of  $C$ .) And  $V$  is too much because it is the annual wage bill, and capitalists do not “advance” as capital the annual wage bill, but only a fraction of it corresponding to one “rotation” of the variable capital. The same is true for raw materials. One can cut through these complications by ignoring raw materials, etc., and by taking as the accounting period some average period of one circulation of the variable capital—so that “variable capital” advanced by the capitalists becomes equal to the wage bill over a net period. But one clearly cannot take  $C$  to stand for capital; we have to take  $KU_1(t)$  (which henceforth I shall write as  $KU$ ).

The rate of profit then is  $\frac{S}{(KU + V)}$ . Why should it fall? Because, Marx would say, even if  $\frac{S}{V}$  is rising,  $\frac{KU}{V}$  is rising much faster. But how do we know it? Is it *necessary*? And if so, why? One would suspect, on the contrary, that there cannot be a significant and permanent divergence between the rate of growth of capital and the rate of growth of surplus value, because these two *are not independent quantities*: Capital is nothing but accumulated surplus value. If surplus value becomes very small (relatively), so will the *growth* of capital.

Let us leave Marx, who was heroically breaking completely new ground, in peace. Let us ask ourselves how it is that successive generations of “Marxists” failed to see that there was a functional relationship between “this year’s” surplus value and “next year’s” capital. Why did they not try to elaborate the relationship? Why, instead, did they keep squabbling about the “falling rate of profit” and tinkering with fallacious verbal arguments? Their preference of dogma to real research, even using their own categories, is the only possible explanation.

Let us give a numerical example, which should make understanding easier.

Let us assume that in period 0 the volume of fixed capital is 500, the input of working hours is 200, and the volume of net output is 200. Then the net output per hour worked is  $\frac{200}{200} = 1$ . Unit value (that is, hours worked per unit of volume of net output) is also  $\frac{200}{200} = 1$ . The rate of exploitation is 1, which means that net output is equally shared among workers and capitalists. If the volume of net output is 200, total wages = 100, and total surplus value = total profit = 100.

Now let us assume a depreciation rate of 10 percent. This means that the

value of gross output is net output + 10 percent of the value of fixed capital. Unit value being 1, the value of fixed capital is  $500 \times 1 = 500$ , and 10 percent of this is 50. So gross output in period 0 is 250. Then the rate of profit is

$$\frac{100}{500 + 100} = \frac{100}{600} = \frac{1}{6} = 0.1666 \dots$$

Suppose surplus value is accumulated in the proportion of  $\frac{1}{2}$ . Of the net output of period 0, 50 are then accumulated. The volume of fixed capital for the next period to be considered (period 1) becomes  $500 + 50 = 550$ . Suppose also that between period 0 and period 1, net labor productivity per hour worked increases by 10 percent. Assume total hours worked to remain the same. Then total net output in period 1 is 220. Its total value of course has not changed: It is by definition equal to the number of hours worked, which remained the same. Unit values have of course fallen by exactly the reciprocal of the rise in productivity; the value of the unit of output is now  $\frac{200}{220} = \frac{1}{1.1} = 0.9090 \dots$ . Gross output is, measured in physical terms or in unit values of period 0: 220 (net output) + 55 (depreciation at 10 percent of capital of 550) = 275. In terms of values of period 1, it is  $275 \times \frac{1}{1.1} = 250$ .

What has happened to the rate of exploitation, to the organic composition of capital, and to the rate of profit?

$V$  is, in period 1 (and in value terms of period 1)  $100 \times \frac{1}{1.1} = 90.90 \dots$  (we assume, of course, as Marx did, and to remain within the framework of *his* hypotheses, that the real wage per hour remains constant).  $S$  is thus  $200 - 90.90 = 109.09 \dots$ . Be it in value terms or in physical terms, *the rate of exploitation has increased*. It is now  $\frac{120}{100}$ , or  $\frac{109.0909 \dots}{90.9090 \dots} = 1.2$  instead of 1, which it was in period 0. Marx is satisfied on this account.

*The organic composition of capital*, in the sense in which we have defined it, *has also risen*. It has evolved (in physical terms) from  $\frac{500}{100}$  to  $\frac{550}{100}$ . It has evolved (in value terms) from  $\frac{500}{100}$  to  $\frac{500}{90.90 \dots}$ . Marx ought to be satisfied on this account too.

But what happened to the *rate of profit*? It was  $\frac{1}{6} = 0.166 \dots$  in period 0. It is now, in physical terms,

$$\frac{120}{550 + 100} = \frac{120}{650} = 0.1846 \dots$$

In value terms it is now

$$\frac{109.0909 \dots}{500 + 90.9090 \dots} = \frac{109.0909 \dots}{590.9090 \dots} = 0.1846 \dots$$

also. The rate of profit has thus increased!

For the reader who is not afraid of a little algebra, this result can easily be generalized and the general conditions laid down for the rate of profit to increase, decrease, or remain static.

Let us consider all quantities in physical terms (the reasoning is strictly the same in value terms, only the notations become more cumbersome). Let  $X$  be the net output in period 0,  $W$  the mass of wages,  $K$  the total constant capital. Surplus value (or mass of profits) is then  $X - W$ , and the rate of profit is  $\frac{X - W}{K + W}$ . If we call  $e$  the rate of exploitation in period 0, then  $e = \frac{X - W}{W}$ . Surplus value is now written  $X - W = eW$ . If we call  $n$  the "organic composition of capital," i.e., the ratio of the whole stock of constant capital to the mass of wages,  $n = \frac{K}{W}$  and constant capital is now written  $K = nW$ .

The formula for the rate of profit (for period 0) then becomes

$$\frac{eW}{nW + W} = \frac{e}{n + 1}.$$

Now suppose that a certain fraction  $f$  of the surplus value of period 0 is accumulated and added to the stock of capital ( $0 < f < 1$ ). Then constant capital in period 1 is  $K + f(X - W) = nW + feW$ . Suppose also that net productivity of labor increases between period 0 and period 1 by  $p$  percent. The net output in period 1 becomes  $X(1 + p)$ . Suppose, moreover, that total working hours remain the same and that real hourly wages also remain constant (Marx's hypothesis). The mass of wages in period 1 will then be the same as in period 0, i.e.,  $W$ . Surplus value in period 1 will be  $X(1 + p) - W$ . Since  $X - W = eW$ ,  $X = W + eW = (1 + e)W$ ; the surplus value for period 1 can therefore be written:

$$(1 + e)(1 + p)W - W = W(e + p + ep).$$

Constant capital is now, as we have seen,  $nW + feW$ . Variable capital is still  $W$ . So total capital is  $nW + feW + W = W(n + fe + 1)$ .

The rate of profit for period 1 will thus be:

$$\frac{W(e + p + ep)}{W(n + fe + 1)} = \frac{e + p + ep}{n + fe + 1}.$$

Is this greater or smaller than the rate of profit in period 0, namely,  $\frac{e}{n + 1}$  ?

To find out, we have to ascertain whether the difference

$$\frac{e + p + ep}{n + fe + 1} - \frac{e}{n + 1}$$

is positive, zero, or negative. If it is positive, the rate of profit has increased. If it is zero, it has remained the same. If it is negative, the rate of profit has fallen.

It is easy to see that the sign of the difference will be the same as the sign of the expression

$$(n + 1)(e + p + ep) - e(n + fe + 1),$$

which reduces to

$$p(1 + n)(1 + e) - e^2f.$$

If  $p(1 + n)(1 + e) - e^2f > 0$ , then the rate of profit is increasing between period 0 and period 1. If it is  $< 0$ , then the rate of profit has fallen.

*It now becomes obvious why all the discussion about the falling rate of profit is so much idle talk. For it all depends on the numerical values of the various parameters (e, n, f, and p) about which nothing can be said a priori.*

A more eloquent form of this inequality is

$$\frac{p}{f} > \frac{e^2}{(1 + n)(1 + e)}$$

expressing the condition for the rate of profit to be rising (or, if one reverses the inequality sign, to be falling).

In our numerical examples  $p = 0.1$ ;  $f = 0.5$ ;  $e = 1$ ;  $n = 5$ . So we had

$$\frac{0.1}{0.5} > \frac{1}{6 \times 2}, \text{ i.e., } \frac{1}{5} > \frac{1}{12}.$$

In current reality, the order of magnitude of the various parameters are  $p \approx 0.03$ ,  $f \approx 0.25$ ,  $e \approx 1$ ,  $n \approx 8$ . So we would have  $\frac{0.03}{0.25} > \frac{1}{9 \times 2}$ , i.e.,  $0.12 > 0.055 \dots$

The rate of profit ought therefore to be rapidly rising, and by a wide margin. Why is it, then, that apart from short-term fluctuations, it has remained practically constant? The answer is that Marx's "laws" of constant real wages and of the rising rate of exploitation *are not true*. As a result of the class struggle, real wage rates have risen, secularly, and this has prevented the rate of profit from rising.

It should not be forgotten that, in the previous formula,  $e$  and  $n$  represent the rate of exploitation and the organic composition *in the initial period*, respectively; consequently, if the reasoning is carried over to a third period, their values will have to be replaced by the values obtaining in the second period. Furthermore,  $p$  and  $f$  have been taken as both constant and independent of each other—which is certainly not true (there is definitely a functional relationship between the rate of growth of productivity and the rate of growth in capital stock). These, and various other considerations, should be taken into account if one wants to construct a "model" of the long-term workings of capitalist economy. But this is not our purpose here. Suffice it to say that in any plausible model of this sort surplus value, wages, and stock of capital should all be exponential functions of time (i.e., quantities that increase according to a compound interest law), the rates of growth of which turn out to be of the same order of magnitude—so that there can be neither increasing rate of exploitation nor rising organic composition of capital *in value terms* nor falling rate of profit.

B. We will not dwell long on the empirical confirmation or refutation of the “falling rate of profit.” If there were such a thing it would not be difficult to adduce statistical evidence to prove it. All one sees in the “Marxist” literature are partial and short-term *examples*, which of course are quite irrelevant, for it is in the nature of capitalist economy that the rate of profit is continuously fluctuating up and down. One can always find instances of periods, countries, sectors, or firms where the rate of profit has fallen. In the same way, I can “prove” that the earth is rapidly cooling and will be covered with a thick sheet of ice by 1973; I only have to measure the temperatures every year between July and January, and extrapolate the graph. (You could, conversely, choose the period between January and July and “prove” that we will all have been evaporated by 1972; I prefer skiing.)<sup>2</sup>

C. The whole argument is moreover irrelevant: It is a red herring. We have discussed it only because it has become an obsession in the minds of many honest revolutionaries, who cannot disentangle themselves from the fetters of traditional theory. What difference does it make to capitalism as a whole that profits today average, say, 12 percent, whereas they averaged 15 percent a century ago? Would this, as is sometimes implied in these discussions, slow down accumulation, and thereby the expansion of capitalist production? And even supposing it did: *So what?* When and by how much? And what is the relevance of this idea in a world where, not for a year, not for two years, but over the last quarter of a century production has expanded at rates undreamed of even in the heydays of capitalism? And even if this “law” were true, *why would it cease to be true under socialism?*

The only “basis” of the “law” in Marx is something that has nothing to do with capitalism itself; it is the *technical fact* of more and more machines and fewer and fewer men. Under socialism, things would be even “worse.” Technical progress would be accelerated—and what, in Marx’s reasoning is a check against the falling rate of profit under capitalism, namely, the rising rate of exploitation, would not have an equivalent under socialism. Would a socialist economy therefore come to a standstill because of a scarcity of funds for accumulation?

We know our “Marxists.” We know they will reply with irrelevant incantations about “labor power not being a commodity under socialism,” “social surplus not being surplus value,” etc. Let them try to prove that these arguments change anything in the relation between social surplus destined for accumulation and stock of existing capital. They don’t.

### *The Different Significations of “Constant Capital”*

In volume 1 of *Capital* Marx uses *C* to denote the depreciation of *fixed* capital embodied in the value of an individual product or of a firm’s output, *plus* the value of the “nondurable” producer’s goods used up in production (raw materials, fuel, etc.).

If the total economy is considered, that is, if the accounts of all the firms, etc., are consolidated, the value of output does *not* contain the value of raw ma-

terials, fuel, etc. (i.e., circulating constant capital), for this is, so to speak, dissolved in the value added by the living labor that produces them and the value of the equipment *used up* (i.e., its depreciation) to produce them. For instance, the value of output, in Britain, in a year, does not contain the full value of completed automobiles, *plus* the full value of the steel sheets embodied in them, *plus* the full value of raw steel, *plus* the full value of iron ore, etc., because this would be double (or multiple) counting. All the “intermediate” producer’s goods “come out in the wash” of the consolidation. [Things would happen differently if the economy “consumed its stocks” of raw materials, etc., over a period of time—which never happens in normal times.] So the value of gross final output is depreciation plus wages plus profit. And if we use the formula  $C + V + S$  in this case, we should be careful to remember that *for the total economy C does not contain the value of raw materials, etc., but only depreciation.*

But  $C$  can be used in yet a third sense, as by Marx in volumes 2 and 3 of *Capital*. It was there used to denote the value of the *total capital stock*, i.e., the value of all the equipment physically present in the production process, and irrespective of the value it actually adds (through depreciation) to current output. It is clear that this does not coincide with depreciation (except in the completely unreal case of a fully static economy, where all equipment goods would have the same useful lifetime, and on condition that we take as “accounting period” this very lifetime).

One has to recognize that Marx himself fell into confusion on these various uses of  $C$  on more than one occasion. For instance, the whole discussion on the “equalization of the rate of profit” as between sectors of the economy in volume 3 of *Capital* is conducted on the basis of a confusion of “constant capital” as sum of depreciation plus value of materials, etc., and “constant capital” as total fixed capital [or “advanced capital”]. Therefore, apart from an inconsistency in Marx’s calculations (which L. von Bortkiewicz corrected in 1907) these calculations contain a fundamental error: What is in fact equalized, in Marx’s examples, is “profit margins on the value of gross output,” and not at all “profit rates on capital.”<sup>3</sup> But it is obvious that, when we speak about “rate of profit,” it is profit over “advanced capital” that we have in mind, and this includes the *total* of fixed capital; if we relate profit to  $C$  in the first or in the second sense given earlier, this is not rate of profit on capital, but profit margins on the value of current gross output. That is why in the main body of this appendix we have used the symbol  $K$  for total fixed capital.

### Notes

1. T/E: In this and following paragraphs, Castoriadis has altered his previous formulation of these equations, introducing

$$\frac{U_1(t)}{U_2(t)} = a.$$

2. From time to time one can see in various *Marxist-Leninist Heralds* comments of this kind:

*New York, February 15, 1963.* General Motors announced that its profits for 1962 were 1.5 billion dollars, as against 1.8 billion in 1961. This proves, once again, Marx’s law of the falling rate of profit.



*New York, February 17, 1964.* General Motors announced that its profits for 1963 were 2.2 billion dollars, as against 1.5 billion in 1962. This proves once more, against all the renegades and revisionists, the truth of Marx's law of the rising rate of exploitation.

3. Cf. Paul Sweezy, *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (1942; reprinted, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), pp. 108-30; J. Winternitz, "Value and Prices," *Economic Journal*, 58 (1948), pp. 276ff.; K. May, "Value and Price of Production," *Economic Journal*, 58 (1948), pp. 596ff.; Joan Robinson, *Collected Economic Papers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), p. 137. We have formulated what we believe to be the solution of the problem of the "equalization of the rate of profit" in the general case in *DC II, Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 13 (January 1954), pp. 78-81.

[It is worth noting that during the discussion of the various schemes of reproduction in volume 2 of *Capital*, *C* is used to refer to still another sense of the term, midway between the first two defined earlier. These schemes imply a *partial* (i.e., sector-by-sector) consolidation of the economy; thus, "intermediate producers' goods" do not appear here if they are productively consumed in the course of a period of time within Sector I (production of the means of production) but appear rather as a product of Sector I "sold" to Sector II (production of consumer goods).]

## Author's Introduction to the 1974 English Edition

### I

When *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* was first drafted in 1959 its soundness or otherwise could not be vindicated on the basis of current experience. Its essential ideas, summed up in the synopsis and in the final section, were *not* a description of an overwhelming mass of empirical evidence. Nor were they an extrapolation of observations according to “exact,” established, and safe scientific methods. They certainly bore a relation to actual events and trends—but this relation entailed not only a new interpretation of the “facts,” but novel decisions as to which “facts” were relevant and which not. These decisions were equivalent to—and could only be made by means of—a change of the traditional theoretical framework. This change, in turn, derived not so much from purely theoretical work as from a new conception of what socialism was about.

The text asserted, for instance, that the standard of living of the working class was rising and would continue to rise; that permanent unemployment did not any more, and would not in the future, have the numerical significance it had had during the previous 150 years of capitalist development and that the capitalist State had become able to control the level of overall economic activity and to prevent major crises of overproduction. All this was certainly correct, insofar as the 1950s were concerned. But this period, taken in itself, might well have been just another phase of cyclical expansion of capitalism, as the 1920s had been. During such periods there had always been a rise in real wages, a decline in unemployment, and an apparently triumphant ability of the ruling classes to manage their business well.

The text also asserted that the absence of political activity by the masses, in advanced capitalist countries, was the expression of a new, deep, and lasting character of modern capitalism. It called the phenomenon privatization and contended that it would form the central problem confronting the activity of revolutionaries during the coming historical period. To be sure, the population had remained politically inactive in Western countries throughout the 1950s. In France, de Gaulle had come to power in 1958 amid general apathy. But periods of “retreat” in the political activity of the masses had been the rule in capitalist history. There was nothing, empirically, forcing one to think that we were facing a new phenomenon.

Again, the text asserted that the new attitudes of youth and its revolts against various aspects of the system had nothing in common with the “conflict of generations” observed in most societies from time immemorial; that these new attitudes expressed a total rejection of the system by the young; that established society was becoming unable to breed a new generation that would reproduce the preexisting state of affairs—and that the revolt of youth could become an important ferment to the process of social transformation. True, in the late 1950s, student demonstrations in Turkey and Korea had brought about the fall of particularly corrupt and reactionary governments—but they might have been seen

“simply” as political manifestations; after all, in less industrialized countries, students had played, for a long time, an important political role.

Finally, the text contended that narrow “economic” and “political” issues, in the traditional meaning of those terms, were becoming less and less relevant, and that the revolutionary movement, henceforth, ought to be concerned not with abstractions but with everything that men and women do and are subject to in present society, and first of all with the questions they face in their real everyday lives. All this amounted to diagnosing the crisis of society as a crisis of its whole fabric and organization, and of what held that fabric together, that is, of meanings, motivations, responsibility, and of socialization itself. To that crisis the system tried to respond by means of an ever-increasing “consumption” and by enticing people into the “rat race.” It was asserted that this response would not be able to take the system very far, for the emptiness and absurdity of this philosophy of just “more and more” would sooner or later prove its own condemnation. All this might have been just a collection of “literary,” “psychological,” “sociological,” or “philosophical” impressions and notations (correct or not, interesting or not). The real question was that of their relevance to revolutionary activity.

Fifteen years later one is entitled to state that these ideas have been amply “confirmed by experience.” Economic developments in industrialized countries can be understood only on the basis of the conceptions defined in this text, even when new and unforeseeable factors have intervened dramatically (we devote the second part of this introduction to this point). No *political* activity of the masses—and in particular of the proletariat—has manifested itself, and not because opportunities have been lacking: a general strike in Belgium in 1961, eight years of war in Vietnam for the United States, May 1968 in France, three years of social and political crisis in Italy since 1969, unprecedented chaos in Britain over the last three months, [and a miner’s strike during the winter of 1973-74, right in the middle of the oil crisis]. These have not brought about, not even fractionally, not even under the control of the traditional bureaucratic organizations, a *political* mobilization of the proletariat. On the other hand, since the beginning of the 1960s, the involvement and the unrest of the young in general, and more particularly of students, have been the main unsettling factors in Western societies. At the same time, traditional family relationships and the place and role of women in society have been increasingly questioned, as have the capitalist ideologies of growth and consumerism and the capitalist view of the relation between man and nature. The “philosophical” question about the meaning of social life is becoming a “practical” issue for an increasing number of people.

What matters beyond this “factual confirmation” is the question of how and why it was possible to formulate these assertions before the event. What was the general conception and method allowing one to decide, within the chaos of historical and social data, what was relevant and what was not, what contained the seeds of the future and what was just a residue of the past, what corresponded to the deep concerns of living men and women, and what was of interest only to a few pseudotheoreticians? This method and conception have been explicitly for-

mulated in other texts, available in part to the English readers, and it is not our purpose here to outline them again.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to state a general guiding principle: Relevant are those facts that bear upon the revolutionary project, conceived of as a radical transformation of society brought about by the autonomous self-activity of people. It is then *this self-activity*—or its absence—its forms and its contents, past and present, actual and potential, which become the central theoretical category, the Archimedean point of interpretation. Divorced from this, any theory, however elaborated, however subtle, and however complex, is bound, sooner or later, to reveal its identity with the most basic—even if hidden—tenets of the ideology of capitalism and, more generally, of all alienated societies. These tenets are that human beings are just a particular class of objects or things, to be described, analyzed, and predicted by theory, and to be handled and manipulated by a “practice” that is only a question of technique.

Given this, it is not difficult to provide an answer to another, apparently baffling question, namely, “How is it that the opponents and defenders of the Marxist method—the self-styled ‘science’ of society and revolution—have proved consistently unable, whatever their particular brand of creed, to predict anything, or even to see what was happening around them? How is it that neither in 1960 nor in 1965 nor in 1970 nor today have they been able to foresee—or just to see—such increasingly massive facts of life as the continued expansion of capitalist production and its implications, the growing importance of working-class struggles at the point of production concerning the conditions and organization of work, the political “apathy” and privatization of people, the extent and depth of the revolt of the young, the crisis of traditional family relations, the women’s movement, etc., etc., etc.?” The reason is, in the first place, that their very conception makes them blind. It is not just a question of this or that particular thesis. It is the spirit of their conception, its central logical and philosophical core, that is at fault, for it directs their sights toward that which is irrelevant, toward that which can allegedly be grasped through the “scientific” method.

Let us add that “scientific method” is here a misnomer. A scientific attitude cannot just proceed while ignoring what is happening to its object. Marx, who certainly was not an empiricist, never stopped trying to relate his thinking to the economic, political, and cultural developments of his epoch. But this is not enough. When a theory is disproved by the facts, or has to face facts it did not and could not predict—or which it cannot interpret—it is well known that it can always be rescued, through resort to additional hypotheses, provided the sum total of these hypotheses remains logically consistent. This might work up to a point. But beyond that the heaping of hypotheses upon hypotheses is nearly always the sign that a theory is dead.

The most famous example in the history of science is that of the “epicycles.” During several centuries astronomers attempted to make the observed movements of the planets fit in with the view that the earth was the center of the universe (the so-called geocentric system). In today’s scientific parlance, to say of a conception that it has reached the epicycles phase is to say that it no longer holds water.

But the various brands of contemporary “Marxists” are unable to do even

that. Everything has to be rigidly fitted into a theory formulated 125 years ago—or, more exactly, into the particular version of that theory which the particular “Marxist” in question considers the only correct one. Whatever cannot thus be forced into the preconceived framework is ignored—wholesale or in all its essentials. Thus most Marxist “interpretations” of the student revolt of May 1968 in France boil down to this: The students were struggling against the unemployment that awaited them at the end of their studies. Apart from the intrinsic stupidity of such an “interpretation,” it is worth noting how the point of substance has been made to disappear, namely, the *content* of the struggle and of the students’ demands. The students were not asking the government to provide them with a guarantee that they would find employment after graduation; they were trying to impose self-government, to abolish the traditional master-pupil relationship, to change the programs, the methods, the direction of their studies. All this would not help them in the least subsequently to find gainful employment (indeed, within the existing system the contrary would probably be the case). It was in the aforementioned specific demands that the historical importance and novelty of the students’ movement lay.

In the case of economics, the privileged field of “Marxists,” the situation is much worse. Thus the continued growth of capitalist production is either ignored or “explained” by the “production of armaments.” One wonders where to start and where to stop a discussion of this grotesque argument. To have a *prima facie* plausibility, the argument would require that the production of armaments had been increasing and was continuing to increase in relative terms, within output as a whole. In fact, over the last quarter of a century, and for the industrialized world as a whole, the contrary is true. *Relative terms* are, of course, the only significant ones in considering an expanding whole. This the various “Marxist economists” are organically unable to understand. They always reason in absolute terms, which are totally void of significance. What matters in economics are proportions, *rates* of growth or decline, *relative* accelerations or decelerations, etc. What would you think of a physician who, examining an adolescent, would say, “He is seriously ill, his arms have lengthened by three inches over the last six years; it must be a case of acromegaly!”—and failed to notice that, during the same period, the adolescent as a whole had grown by nearly a foot?

In the same vein we are repeatedly told that, for instance, the U.S. military budget has increased by so many billion dollars this year—but never that it represents, possibly, a *smaller proportion* of the GNP than one year previously. But a declining proportion of armament expenditure ought to have increased the hypothetical difficulties of capitalism. And what is Marx’s political economy talking about? Is it about *use* values, or about “values” and “commodities”? Are not armaments “commodities”? Does the fact that we dislike them make them less a “commodity”? And are armaments produced out of thin air? Assume that their production is rising in either relative or absolute terms. Does this not entail a more or less *pari passu* increase in the output of steel, of electronics, of fuels, etc.—and in output of consumer goods for the workers producing all this?

A “beautiful,” and by no means untypical example of the logic of contempo-

rary “Marxists” can be found in recent attempts to vindicate the concept of a “falling rate of profit” by pointing to the case of *British capitalism over the last decade or so* (are there no other countries and no other periods?) and by explaining this fall in the rate of profit by a *rise* in wages resulting from increased working-class militancy.<sup>2</sup> Let us grant the facts, the premises, and the reasoning. Then how come they fail to see that this, if true, totally *destroys* Marx’s economic theory? The basic postulate of the latter is that labor power is a commodity like any other, and that its “value,” apart from temporary fluctuations, *cannot* be changed through human action. It is not this or that inference but the *basic concept* of the system that is ruined if you accept that the level of wages (and therefore the rate of exploitation) is determined by the class struggle (as, indeed, we asserted in this text fifteen years ago). Second, for Marx, the rate of exploitation must *rise* under capitalism. This is a much clearer and much less ambiguous consequence of his system than the “fall in the rate of profit.” Marx has to explain, and attempts to do so in volume 3 of *Capital*, how it is possible for the rate of profit to fall *despite* a *rising* rate of exploitation (which, of course, in itself, would tend to raise the mass of profits and, other things being equal, the rate of profit as well). Today Marx’s defenders assert that the rate of profit is falling *because* of a *falling* rate of exploitation. Stop and admire.

The general and typical attitude of a contemporary “Marxist,” in this and all other fields, is the combination of a *denial of reality* with the assertion that *tomorrow* (and tomorrow there will, of course, be still further tomorrows) reality will at last correspond to what his theory predicts. (This, of course, implies that today it does not.) In other words, by and large, all contemporary “Marxists” assert simultaneously (implicitly or explicitly):

1. That it is untrue that output is growing, that real wages are increasing, that unemployment is showing no long-term tendency to rise, that deep depressions are absent, etc., and
2. that all these statements are true, but *will cease to be true tomorrow*.<sup>3</sup>

What is important in this respect is to understand how and why this type of totally irrational and antiscientific attitude, masquerading as “science,” can prevail and still be so widespread among otherwise “normal” human beings. This is an immense problem in itself, and a problem of cardinal significance for revolutionary action. For if people determine their behavior on the basis of beliefs that, when stripped of an endless series of rationalizations and irrelevancies, boil down to: “I hold that *p* is true because I think that non-*p* is true,” the question of how and by what process these people can ever learn from experience and become open to logical argument becomes an agonizing one. We cannot enter into all this here. Suffice it to note, first, that this very fact is again a wholesale refutation of the Marxist conception of history (“illusions” can well play a role in history, but not sheer irrationalities—and, then again, these illusions should be amenable to some “rational” explanation, both of their content and of the reasons for which they hold sway over individuals). Second, we have here a new historical phenomenon: the adherence to a set of beliefs that cannot be defined

as an “ideology” in the proper sense of the term (like, for instance, the “liberal” capitalist ideology of the nineteenth century), that is an apparently coherent system of ideas providing a “rational justification” for the interests and the social practice of a given social stratum; or defined as a “religion,” despite the justified temptation to use this term. The “religious” element here is in *the mode of subjective adherence to the set of beliefs*, the search for an unquestionable certainty and the impenetrability to logical argument. But the content of the belief itself, with its “scientific” pretense and its lack of any reference to a transcendent principle or origin, differs substantially from what is historically known as religion. We thus have here a new type of a collective irrational belief that expresses, like all religions, the need of alienated human beings to stop thinking and searching for themselves and to locate outside themselves a source of the truth and a guarantee that time will bring about the fulfillment of their wishes. But in a period of triumphant science this need cannot be satisfied anymore by outright mythical representations like the religious ones. It thus turns, for its satisfaction, to a pseudorational creed. Needless to add, this complex of attitudes and beliefs is part and parcel of the established social world against which a revolutionary has to struggle—and this is no figure of speech: One sees clearly its pernicious and reactionary effects when meeting honest workers or students whose thinking has become almost inextricably confused by the mystifications propagated by the various “Marxist” sects.

## II

It might be useful briefly to examine economic developments in the industrialized countries during the last fifteen years (and especially during the most recent part of this period), and this for two main reasons: first, because in this particular field the confusion created by traditional “Marxists” is the greatest, and second, because recent developments clearly show not only that one is not lost amid economic events because one has repudiated the traditional concepts and methods of analysis but, on the contrary, that this repudiation is the necessary precondition for understanding what is going on.

**Capitalist growth during the 1960s.** During most of the sixties economic expansion in industrialized capitalist countries continued to proceed more or less smoothly along the lines analyzed in sections IV and V of “Modern Capitalism and Revolution.” For the whole of the decade the volume of total output (gross national product at constant market prices) of the OECD countries combined has grown at the average compound rate of 4.8 percent per annum<sup>4</sup>—the rate being slightly less in the United States, higher in continental Europe, much higher in Japan. Growth of private consumers’ expenditure has been roughly similar, and so has the rise in real wages. There have been minor fluctuations in the level of output (or rather in its rate of growth) and in the level of employment, but these remained extremely narrow by pre-World War II standards throughout the period (and to this very day). There has been one main exception

to the general picture: the United Kingdom, for the reasons already discussed in sections VI and VII.

**The expansion of employment.** For these same countries, in the period from 1957 to 1970, the total civilian labor force rose from 264.7 million to 299.4 million, and civilian employment from 257.1 to 291.5 million. The difference between these two figures, roughly equivalent to unemployment, was 7.6 million (that is, 2.87 percent of the labor force in 1957, a boom year) and 7.9 million (that is, 2.64 percent of the labor force in 1970, a slack year). During the same period employment in agriculture fell from 61.2 million in 1957 to 42.1 million in 1970. Thus the capitalist sector of the economy, properly speaking, absorbed, on top of the “natural” increase of 30 million in the labor force, another 19 million released from agriculture. In other words, employment in industry and “services” rose from 195.9 million in 1957 to 249.4 million in 1970 (+ 27 percent in thirteen years, or roughly 2 percent per annum). During the same period the total armed forces declined, for the aggregate of OECD countries, from 6.32 million to 5.84 million (U.S. mobilization for Vietnam partially offsetting French demobilization in Algeria).

In many important countries, in fact, unemployment became *negative* during this period. Thus Germany still had, in 1957, some 760,000 unemployed; by the end of 1973 (and with a recession beginning), not only was the number of jobs vacant still superior to the number of unemployed, and not only had the Federal Republic absorbed some additional hundreds of thousands of refugees from Eastern Germany, but about *two million* immigrant workers (mostly Turks, Yugoslavs, and Greeks) had flown into the country and were working there. This is tantamount to saying that “unemployment” was about *minus 10 percent* of the “German” labor force—in other words that there had been, during the period, not a redundancy but a deficiency of labor to that same extent. In less impressive terms, the same situation prevailed in most other continental countries. France, in addition to absorbing over 1 million French ex-settlers from Algeria, has needed a continuous influx of immigrant labor, and is currently employing about 1.5 million foreign workers (mostly Algerian, African, Spanish, etc.). Immigrant labor is crucial for Switzerland and important in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Sweden. Even the United States has absorbed during this period a flux of immigrants averaging 350,000 per annum (in this case including women and children).

**The wage pressure and inflation.** During the same period, however, a disruptive factor was gaining strength. This was “inflation,” or more exactly, rising prices. The *rate* of increase of the overall price level (“implicit price deflator of the GNP”) has gone up continuously, year after year, from 2.1 percent in 1961 to 5.9 percent in 1970. Accidental and exceptional factors have contributed to the inflation during this or that year, in this or that country. But the universal and steady character of the phenomenon shows that these were not its main causes. The main cause has been the increasing pressure, not only of the industrial workers—though they have been the pacesetters in most cases—but of all “wage and salary earners” for higher incomes, shorter hours of work, and, to an



increasing extent, changes in their working conditions. This pressure has at times taken a more or less explosive form, for instance, the long general strike in France in May-June 1968, or the “rampant May” in Italy that has lasted for almost three years starting in 1969. This pressure was, and still is, continuously present in all industrialized countries.

**Capitalist policies regarding inflation.** In the prevailing conditions of fairly full employment and of buoyant overall demand, individual capitalist firms have virtually no motives (and this within quite wide limits) to resist these pressures. Increased nominal wage costs are easily compensated by higher sale prices. Profit margins are thus preserved, and the value of the firm’s liabilities to banks and bond holders (in terms of the market value of the firm’s product) is reduced. Neither can these pressures be effectively resisted by the capitalist governments in their role as representatives of the “general interest” of the system.

**Failure of “demand management” policies.** For a long period capitalist governments have tried to reduce the speed of wage and price rises through general “demand management” policies. The profound idea behind this is that if you manage to engineer a bigger degree of unemployment, worker militancy will be reduced *pro tanto* through fear of unemployment, and so will wage increases. Some economists have tried to quantify this negative correlation between the level of unemployment and the speed of the wage rises, and the result has been pompously labeled “the Phillips curve.” What is forgotten is that the influence of this demand-supply relationship on the price of labor power<sup>5</sup> that was indeed operative in the “good old days” has virtually ceased to exist.

As events have shown, the employees’ pressure for higher incomes does not lessen, or lessens only very marginally, when unemployment rises *within feasible limits*. *On paper* (that is, if one extrapolated the “curves”), working-class pressure might lessen if one were able to push unemployment to fantastic proportions, say to 10 or 20 percent of the labor force. But no capitalist government is foolish enough to try this, for they know that their system would instantly explode. In other words, the decisive factor here is a secular change in the behavior of wage and salary earners, who have come to consider as granted an increase in their real incomes year in, year out, who are not deterred from this by the usual fluctuations in demand and employment, and who would certainly no longer tolerate massive unemployment. The clearest result of all the econometric work done over the last fifteen years concerning the relation between unemployment and the rate of rise in wages is that even when unemployment is pushed up to a point corresponding to a *zero* real growth of output, there is still a residual and nonnegligible rise in nominal wages. This means that policies tending to push up unemployment (with a view to lessening the pressure on wages) not only are not a cure, from the capitalists’ point of view, but they make things worse (for in this case the rise in wages is still there without the offsetting factor that would otherwise come from the growth in output and the increase in productivity per man-hour worked). British governments, both Tory and Labour, have had a bitter experience of this.

**Failure of “incomes policies.”** The other method thought up by capitalist governments and their advisers to cope with the acceleration of inflation has been the attempted introduction of “incomes policies”—attempts that in virtually all cases have only ended in ludicrous failures. The basic reason for this is, of course, that incomes policies beg the question, for they could only work if the workers were willing to accept that their incomes be fixed by somebody else; but if such were the case, there would have been no need for an incomes policy to begin with. Capitalist governments tend to think that if they secure the agreement of the trade-union bureaucracy on a given rate of “permissible” wage increases, they have thereby solved the problem. They are forced repeatedly to discover (and so is the management of individual firms) that agreement by the trade-union bureaucracy and agreement by the workers are two quite different things.

**Internal consequences of price inflation.** It is well known and easily understood that price and wage rises feed on each other. Once the whole process has started it tends spontaneously to accelerate. And this creates difficult problems for the capitalist economies. For reasons already alluded to, a “mild” degree of general inflation (say, 3 percent per annum) is certainly favorable to capitalist expansion. A rate of inflation of between 5 and 10 percent per annum is possibly something a capitalist economy can cope with. But how much more can it stand? There is certainly a point—though we cannot determine it in advance—beyond which a monetary economy could not function normally, for money would then cease to be a means of storing value, or even a standard for economic calculation.

**International consequences of price inflation.** Moreover, the process creates imbalances between different capitalist countries, or accentuates existing ones. The rate of inflation is almost certain to differ as between countries (depending on the strength of the pressure exerted by wage and salary earners and on various national characteristics such as the relative degree of imbecility of the respective governments). Thus the relative positions of different countries in relation to international trade and payments will be affected in different measure: Some countries find that they are priced out of international markets or that their currency is the object of periodic “crises of confidence” among international financiers (a good example would be British exports and the tribulations of the pound sterling over the last twenty years). To this there is also a cure—at least on paper: the devaluation of the currency of the countries where inflation is strongest. But in order to work, devaluation has to be effective. This means it must succeed in reducing the overall “consumption” of the devaluating country or—what is more or less the same thing—the relative “price” of national labor power compared with that of other countries (the first being the overall supply-demand aspect of the problem, the second the cost aspect of it). Both things boil down essentially to reducing the level of real wages. And this, of course, ultimately depends on the reaction of wage and salary earners vis-à-vis the fall in their real earnings that the devaluation tends to induce (by raising prices of imported goods in terms of national currency). So we are back to square one, for

that is where the problem started. Thus the relative “success” of the dollar devaluations of December 1971 and February 1973 was essentially due to the fact that American labor by and large accepted a fall in its *share* of output (from 1970 to the end of 1973, “real” hourly earnings in U.S. manufacturing—that is, earnings corrected for the rise in consumer prices—rose by about 5 percent while industrial production increased by about 20 percent and output per man-hour by about 10 percent). The failure of successive devaluations of the pound was due to the opposite being the case in Britain.

***A digression on “expectations.”*** A somewhat long digression is necessary here. On top of the “real” factors discussed up to now, so-called psychological factors play a very important role in all economic matters, and particularly in matters of prices and foreign currency values. These factors introduce an additional element of unpredictability and irrationality, and their action tends to amplify disequilibrium as often as not. By the way, the term “psychology” used by academic economists in this respect is quite misleading. The substance of the matter is, of course, that nobody can ever act, either in economic affairs or in any other, without a view about future events and situations he thinks may be relevant and have a bearing upon the outcome of his acts. These views are not, and can never be, a simple, faithful, and adequate repetition or extrapolation of past experience; if they were, they would be even more “wrong” than they usually are. Views about the future play a decisive role in decisions made today. They therefore help to shape the future. This, of course, does not by any means imply that the future will in fact correspond to the view held about it. The effect of a number of people strongly sharing a given view about the future event may be sufficient to bring it about (as when everybody thinks that the international value of the dollar will fall and so sells dollars, thereby making it fall) or to provoke the opposite effect (as when many firms think that production of a given item is going to be extremely profitable in the future and, acting accordingly, provoke an oversupply of the item in question and losses for themselves). No decision whatsoever about investments, for instance, can ever be made without very strong views being adopted ipso facto about a future extending over a number of years.

Once the decision is made and implemented, these views become embodied in lasting changes in the “real world.” Classical (and Marx’s) political economy was based on the old metaphysical postulate that the present is nothing but a sedimentation of the past and either discarded the influence of this factor on the economic process, or treated it implicitly as if it were only some kind of froth surrounding the “real forces,” or as if various decisions and views about the future, and the actions to which they led, could at most deviate at random around some “normal” view and line of action (thus compensating each other on average). This “normal” view was considered “rational” by the classical and neo-classical economists. For Marx, it was partly “rational,” partly “irrational” (the “irrationality” again being the expression of a hidden and contradictory “rationality” at a deeper, nonconscious level).

Now this factor—labeled “expectations” in contemporary economic literature, but for which “projections” would be a better name—plays a decisive role in an economy such as contemporary capitalism. First, this economy exists, and can only exist, in a state of perpetual change (the only certain thing about tomorrow is that it is *not* going to be like today). Second, the monetary and financial factors have acquired an ever-increasing importance in modern capitalism. The result is not that “real” aspects are divorced from the “financial” ones but that they are, in many instances and from many points of view, *subordinated* to the latter. Thus present valuations of all assets and goods (except ephemeral ones, e.g., fresh vegetables) are centrally based on projections of their future valuations. These valuations are a decisive component of decisions leading to real events. This is particularly true, of course, in relation to the relative values of currencies, and important in a period where generalized price inflation forces the decision makers to introduce into their projections certain estimates as to the future course of relative prices. These projections thereby themselves become an important factor in the chain of the inflationary process.

*The Vietnam “accident” and its effects—internal . . .* Let us revert to our main argument. The principal characteristic of advanced capitalist economies during the 1960s was a generalization and acceleration of price inflation, resulting first and foremost from the pressure for higher wages and salaries. Against this background emerged a factor that, from the purely economic point of view, is an “accident,” or rather a constellation of “accidents”: the Vietnam War and the way various U.S. administrations handled its economic consequences. The war in itself created a strong additional “demand” in the United States (from 1964 to 1969 U.S. “defense expenditure” in the national-accounts sense and at current prices rose from \$51.8 to \$81.3 billion, that is, by 57 percent. The gross domestic product during the same period increased from \$638.9 to \$941.5 billion, i.e., by “only” 47 percent). This increased the inflationary pressures. But the problem was not unmanageable “in itself” as is shown by other historical examples. The de Gaulle government continued the Algerian War between 1958 and 1961 *simultaneously with* a “stabilization” of the French economy and a spectacular improvement in its external accounts. That the problem is manageable is also shown by the size of the figures involved: Nothing miraculous is required to “make room” for \$30 billion in additional expenditure on one item, during a period when total available resources are increasing by \$300 billion. The problem was totally “mismanaged” by the Johnson administration because of essentially *political* reasons: the persistent self-delusions about a quick victory in Vietnam, and the reluctance to take unpopular taxation measures in the face of mounting internal opposition to the war.

*. . . And international.* The effect was both an acceleration of the internal price inflation in the United States and a rapid and sharp deterioration of its balance of foreign transactions. The “net exports” of goods and services, which stood at +\$4.5 billion in 1964, had become −\$2.3 billion in 1969. This came on top of a trend, well under way since the mid-1950s, in which Germany, Italy, Japan, and France in that order successively and quite successfully reentered world

markets as competitors in the manufacture of industrial goods and started to undermine the position of U.S. industry. But American capital did not stop, for all that, investing abroad. While such investment was a trifle in relation to the U.S. GNP and resources—on the order of \$3 billion per annum on the average for “direct investment”—it was very important in relation to the size of the external balance.

Now if country A has, in a given year, a trade surplus over country B of \$1 billion, it can either pay in some acceptable form (gold, currencies, etc.) or it can purchase assets in country B (land, buildings, mines, factories). But if country A has a deficit against country B, and on top of that purchases assets in country B, how can it pay for the total? Well, it can pay in IOUs. For how long? For as long as country B accepts the IOUs. And for how long will country B accept IOUs? In normal business (between individuals or firms), IOUs will be accepted only as long as B thinks he has good reasons to believe the IOUs will be honored in due course. It is more or less like this with the international IOUs known as national currencies. It is *not* totally so with the dominant currency of the dominant capitalist country, this particular IOU called the dollar.

***The international monetary system and the dollar standard.*** For various reasons connected with the whole history of Western capitalism since 1933 and particularly since 1945, the United States had succeeded in making the dollar almost legal tender among capitalist countries (and even “socialist” ones). We cannot and need not enter here into all the complexities of the “international monetary system.” For our purposes it is enough to point out that two principal “creditors” of the United States (the German and Japanese central banks) have in fact been willing to absorb all the IOUs, that is, all the dollars that have been pouring out of the United States during the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> At the end of 1960, the country’s “official gold and foreign exchange holdings” were \$17.8 billion; its “short-term liabilities to foreigners,” \$17.3 billion. By the end of 1970 the first figure had fallen to \$11.7 billion, the second risen to \$40.5 billion. The increase of around \$30 billion in the net liabilities of the United States during the period is of the same order of magnitude as “direct U.S. investment abroad.”

Since 1914 virtually all countries have lived, internally, with a paper-money system. And this system has covered, since 1960, international transactions as well. For in fact, for the past fifteen years or so, the capitalist world has been living in a dollar standard system, or a *cours forcé* of paper money—shrouded by the thin veil of the theoretical “convertibility” of the dollar into gold, a veil that was torn by Nixon on August 15, 1971. This was an unthinkable situation for “classical” and Marxist political economy, for which such a system was not “wrong” (as Jacques Rueff and the late General de Gaulle kept saying) but intrinsically absurd, verging on the impossible, and bound to collapse within days, weeks, or months at the utmost. But this system appears “normal” in present conditions, for in fact modern capitalism cannot work unless it extends, on the world scale, the monetary, banking, and credit functions that are the basis of its operations at the national level. This creates particular problems, for which

there is neither a “natural” solution (with gold playing the role of “universal money,” as Marx thought) nor an easy and immediate institutional solution.

**Possible “solutions” to the international monetary problem.** The fantastic expansion of international trade and financial transactions of all kinds has made it impossible, for a long time now, for gold to perform the function of “international money”—and this for roughly the same reasons that have eliminated everywhere this function of gold at the national level. This expansion of trade has required that the central banks of various countries behave toward each other like banks within a country, accepting each other’s “bills” (the respective currencies, or claims in such currencies) and settling their accounts through clearing and bookkeeping operations. Through a process similar to that which imposes a single actual “money” within a given country (even before the law defines a single type of “legal tender”), one of the currencies involved comes to play the role, first of universal instrument of payments and of a standard for prices and, subsequently, even that of a means of storing value (holding “liquid” or quasi-liquid assets in a form that is readily usable in the international commodity and financial markets). For obvious reasons this currency will be that of the country that is “dominant” in international trade and finance (the pound sterling up to the First World War, the dollar since the 1930s). But contrary to what is the case within a single country (where the bills of one bank, the central bank, become “legal tender,” their acceptance being enforced by law), “independent” countries cannot be forced to accept a foreign currency against their will. Thus final net balances between countries over a given period may have to be settled through transfers of a universally accepted asset. Up to recent years gold has retained this function along with the dollar.

But not only is gold not money any longer (for instance, it is not and cannot be the “standard of prices”); gold cannot even properly perform the function of a final means of settlement, as the events of the last fifteen years have shown. There are various reasons for this that we do not need to discuss in detail here. Suffice it to mention the main one: In the prevailing social and political climate, no capitalist country is likely to agree to subordinate its economic policies—that is, its rate of expansion and its levels of demand and employment—to the necessity of settling in gold the balance of its external transactions. It will prefer to alter, as frequently as necessary, its exchange rate. Once this starts being done systematically (that is, once the fetishism attached to the “value of the national currency” is overcome), the “international” function of gold becomes redundant.

On paper, it is not difficult to “solve” the international money problem. A world central bank could be established to perform the role a central bank performs at the national level, regulating the activities of, and extending credit under specified conditions to, the various national central banks. But obviously this would be impossible without a world political authority (it would imply that the various capitalist governments had abandoned a substantial part of their economic independence). Such an authority cannot be established “amicably” given the strife and scramble among individual capitalist countries (the fate of

the International Monetary Fund proved this, if proof were needed). A world central bank might be imposed by the dominant power as long as there was an undisputed dominant power (indeed, the International Monetary Fund, insofar as it played any effective role at all, was a mere instrument of the U.S. Federal Reserve System up to the end of the sixties; the Russians have found things much easier within the area of their political domination). The decline in relative economic and political power of the United States in recent years, and in particular the strong deterioration of its external balance, has made it impossible for it to continue, let alone to strengthen, its activities as “regulator in the last resort.”

The remaining possibility is that of a more or less “autonomous” regulating mechanism such as the one provided by frequent changes in the relative international “values” of currencies. At the limit this becomes a system of “generalized floating rates.” This has its own irrationalities and problems (in particular, countries for which the float leads to a continuous devaluation of their currency may have to face the internal problems discussed earlier in connection with straightforward devaluation), though as some international experts noted last year, critics of the system seem to forget that there are not many alternatives.<sup>7</sup> The currently prevailing situation, a halfway house between the “generalized float,” the dollar standard, and lingering residues of the traditional role of gold, contains even more unsettling elements.

*The monetary turmoil of 1969-73 . . .* Among these unsettling elements let us only mention the decisive role of “expectations” or projections concerning future values of currencies (and therefore also of international values of commodities and assets). These can exert an extremely destabilizing influence. This factor was already central to the sequence of events that led to the indefinite “suspension” of the convertibility of the dollar in August 1971, and to its devaluations in December 1971 and February 1973. It had already contributed to the misfortunes of the pound sterling for many years. As long as there was “confidence” in the dollar, not only central banks but also private banks, multinational corporations, etc., have for years been piling up dollars (holding their liquid assets in the form of dollars or short-term dollar claims). This had been done to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. When this confidence began to erode in 1969 a “flight from the dollar” began, which rapidly fed upon itself and reached unmanageable proportions by the first half of 1971, eventually forcing the United States to abolish dollar convertibility and then to devalue.

This sequence of events, which seemed at the time to leave the capitalist economy without an international means of payments, might have triggered a general “crisis of confidence” and led to a recession deeper than previous ones, or even to a depression, the more so as the events of the 1971 summer came at a time when the U.S. economy was still in a state of policy-engineered recession (1970-71) and the other industrial countries were experiencing one of their periodic decelerations in their growth rates. Indeed, in the autumn of 1971 all stock exchanges nose-dived. Expectations were bleak. And Marxists announced again, with more emphasis than usual, that the “last crisis” of capitalism was around the corner.

. . . **And the 1972-73 boom.** In fact, and despite a continuing unrest in international monetary affairs, one of the strongest booms in the whole history of capitalism started at about this time. The rate of growth of the GNP for all OECD countries combined rose from 3.5 percent in 1971 to almost 6 percent in 1972 and to more than 7 percent in 1973. Meanwhile, international trade exhibited unprecedented rates of expansion. The period was also (save for a short-lived ripple from mid-1971 to the spring of 1972, mainly due to the Nixon price freeze in the United States) one of fast-rising prices (for the same basic reasons as stated earlier), this time reinforced by an increase in food prices (mainly the result of the wonderful efficiencies of U.S. and USSR agricultural “policies”), and in the prices of raw materials (where the role of inflationary expectations has been important). By mid-1973 the overall price level in OECD countries combined was rising at an annual rate of 8.5 percent and more.<sup>8</sup> After a while the dollar devaluations started taking effect. During 1973 the U.S. trade balance was moving rapidly into the black. After a low point, reached in June 1973, restoration of confidence in the dollar started pushing up its international value.

By the early autumn of 1973 the prospects were that, after the exceptionally strong boom of the last two years, 1974 would be a year of slower expansion (indeed, the signs of slowing down in the U.S., Germany, and Japan were rather clear). There would be a much quieter international monetary situation, although inflation would continue more or less unabated.

**The Yom Kippur “accident.”** Then the Yom Kippur War exploded. Arab oil was embargoed. Oil prices quadrupled in three months. The prices of other raw materials skyrocketed. And Mr. Heath, availing himself of some erroneous statistics, refused British miners a modest pay raise.

These events confronted Western capitalism with an unprecedented threat. Here was the distinct possibility of economic disruption as a consequence of the sudden scarcity of a fundamental physical element of production (energy). This scarcity had resulted not from economic but from political factors. These factors revealed dramatically the catastrophic implications, which had been accumulating for a long time, of the process of capitalist (and “socialist”) technological development. But, even short of disruption, the impact of the oil crisis could have been tremendous. Cutting dramatically the demands of some strategic sectors of capitalist production (e.g., automobile industry, aircraft, etc.) while simultaneously reducing the output possibilities of virtually all other sectors (even agriculture), the latter not being in any way a compensation for the former, the oil crisis could have annihilated business expectations, could have induced heavy primary cuts in investment as well as in consumption, and might have snowballed into a cumulative depression *combined with* even steeper rises in prices. In brief, it could have led to a situation where a Napoleon cum Keynes would have felt lost and where the Nixons, Heaths, Wilsons, and Pompidous would have appeared as mentally backward children required to solve the problems of unified field theory. In such a situation the traditional instruments of “demand management,” which at long last capitalist governments had painfully learned



how to apply, would have been utterly useless. Measures of quasi-war economy (strict allocation of scarce resources, control of prices and wages, if not wholesale rationing, etc.) would have had to be applied, and the population made to accept them, in conditions of “peace.”

### *Present Prospects*

At the time of writing (early March 1974), all the odds seem to be that unless social struggles develop (which is, of course, possible, and even more likely than, say, a year ago, but by no means inevitable) the capitalist economy will be able to reemerge from the huge turmoil provoked by the oil crisis—superimposed upon an incipient slowing down of the business cycle, itself superimposed upon a lingering international monetary crisis, itself superimposed upon a continuously accelerating inflation—at no more cost than just another recession. This recession may possibly prove no more severe than previous ones that have occurred since the end of World War II.<sup>9</sup>

But note: We are *not*, *absolutely not*, committed either to this particular “forecast” or this *type* of forecast. There might have been (and still might be) on this occasion (or on some future one) a very deep economic crisis, or even a disruption of the capitalist economy deeper than even the most sanguine Trotskyist ever dared dream about. But such a crisis would not be a confirmation but rather a *refutation* of the whole Marxist conception, economic and overall. For it would not be amenable to Marxist analysis for the same reasons the present situation is not amenable to an analysis of this type. It would not have been the outcome of those factors that the Marxist conception considers operative and fundamental. In particular, it would not be the product of any “contradiction” between the capacity of the system to “produce surplus value” and its incapacity to “realize surplus value.” It would be the result of factors about which Marxism has little or nothing to say (or which it considers secondary and peripheral in relation to the “fundamental economic laws” of capitalism). The most important of these factors are the social struggles as basic determinants of economic developments; the political conflicts between and within the ruling strata of various countries, the necessarily half-“rational,” half-“irrational” way in which capitalist governments manage the economy and decide their general policies; the world military-political game and its present stage (which conditions the ability of the rulers of a few Bedouin tribes to extract overnight a rent of about \$100 billion a year from the imperialist powers. Can this be explained in terms of the “labor theory of value”—or is it a manifestation of the “falling rate of profit?”); and, last but not least, the intrinsic absurdity of the capitalist *technological* development celebrated by Marx and the Marxists as Reason itself in action.

This possibility that recent international political events might have triggered an economic crisis (the occurrence, type, and content of which would have been unforeseen and unforeseeable for anybody, and in particular for Marxists using their “method”) amply confirms the conceptions formulated in this text. Such a crisis, had it arisen—or if it does arise—would have been an “accident” in rela-

tion to the economy itself. It would have been the effect not of the internal working of the economy as such but of factors external and extrinsic to the economy—and this is, since Aristotle, the very definition of an “accident.” We have stated (section VI) that “if each particular crisis may appear to be an accident, in contemporary society the existence of such accidents and their periodic recurrence are absolutely inevitable.” For this society is fundamentally *irrational*. And this entails that there is *not* a single, straight, beautiful (and thus finally rational) “dynamics of its contradictions.” This may drive to despair those who thought they had found, in three elementary economic formulas, the key to the secrets of human history. But these people, whatever they may label themselves, have never understood what the revolution is about.

For revolutionaries one central point must be grasped to understand how the system works: the struggle of human beings against their alienation, and the ensuing conflict and split in all spheres, aspects, and moments of social life. As long as this struggle is there the ruling strata will continue to be unable to organize their system coherently, and society will lurch forward from one accident to another. These are the conditions for a revolutionary activity in the present epoch—and they are amply sufficient.

March 17, 1974

### Notes

1. *RR* in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, 35 (January 1964), in English: *Redefining Revolution* (London: Solidarity, 1974). *MTR* in *S. ou B.*, 36-40 (April 1964 to June 1965). [T/E: *RR* is to be included in vol. 3 of the present series. *MTR/MRT* is the first part of *IIS*.]

2. E.g., A. Glyn and B. Sutcliffe, *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profit Squeeze* (London: Penguin, 1972). [T/E: This note was added for the 1979 French edition.]

3. Similarly, (a) I have not stolen, (b) I stole but it was \$10 and not \$1,000, (c) I stole because I was hungry.

4. The twenty-two OECD countries (non-Soviet Europe, United States, Canada, Australia, and Japan) comprise virtually all, and nothing but, industrialized “Western” countries (the only exceptions being South Africa and New Zealand, which are not included, and Turkey and Portugal, which are). Unless otherwise stated, statistical data in what follows are taken from *National Accounts of OECD Countries* (Paris: OECD, 1972), *Labor Force Statistics 1959-1970* (Paris: OECD, 1972), the monthly *Main Economic Indicators* and *Historical Statistics 1959-1969* (Paris: OECD, 1970).

5. On which, by the way, the whole of political economy, classical, neoclassical, and Marxist, is necessarily based.

6. The Bretton Woods Agreement of 1945 provided that dollars were convertible into gold, i.e., that foreign central banks could always ask that their dollars be cashed in gold. The United States complied with the rule as long as it could and wished to, that is during the fifties. In the sixties it stopped doing so, and forced their “allies,” through various devices—Roosa Bonds, swap agreements, etc.—to absorb a net amount of about \$30 billion. Gaullist France refused to play ball and went on converting its surpluses into gold—a sound Marxist policy. France did not find itself better off for that in the end, but the otherwise irrelevant French hymns to the merits of gold played a role in undermining confidence in the dollar and thus contributed to the 1969-73 monetary crises. As for the other countries, the main reasons why they complied with the American demands were, of course, political. But they were also economic: There was no feasible alternative to the maintenance of the dollar standard other than the adoption of floating exchange rates, or—what amounts to the same—periodic up-valuations of other countries’ currencies (deutschmark, yen), which the countries concerned tried to avoid as long as possible in order not to lessen their international competitiveness. Of course, they were not able to avoid it in the end.

7. OECD *Economic Outlook*, July 1973.

8. Figures from OECD *Economic Outlook*, July 1973.

9. There is a proviso—and it is a very important one. It is that after the huge “once and for all” rise in price levels caused by recent events has worked its way through the system (the leading capitalist economies must allow such a rise to take place in order to reduce the shift in terms of trade between industrialized and oil + raw materials-producing countries, and restore some balance in international transactions between the former and the latter), the capitalist countries either succeed in stopping the acceleration of price inflation or learn to live with “Latin American” price conditions. Nothing guarantees that they will succeed. And nothing guarantees that they won’t. As we have repeatedly stated, the outcome ultimately depends, here again, on the reactions and actions of working people.



## Appendixes



# Appendix A:

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## Appendix B: Glossary

We present here a small number of French words and their English-language equivalents, which might be of interest to the scholar. Given the absence of any significant translation complications, the text itself can stand on its own for the general reader without requiring special explanations, with the following few exceptions.

Unlike Castoriadis's later writings, the texts translated here contain few specialized terms and neologisms peculiar to the author's writings of this period. The only technical terms that appear in these texts come from the fields of philosophy, sociology, and economics (and often directly from Marx's writings). We usually have provided the standard translation term in these cases.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <i>autogestion</i> | <i>self-management.</i>   |
| <i>décollement</i> | <i>coming unstuck.</i> A term <i>S. ou B.</i> tried to popularize which was used to describe the process whereby the proletariat was freeing itself from the hold of the CP.            |
| <i>dépasser</i>    | <i>to outstrip, overcome, overtake, surmount.</i> Unlike Alan Sheridan-Smith's translation of Sartre's <i>Critique of Dialectical Reason</i> , we have only rarely used "to transcend." |
| <i>direction</i>   | <i>direction</i> (as opposed to execution), <i>leadership</i> (of a political party, State etc.), (the) <i>management</i> (of an enterprise, etc.).                                     |
| <i>dirigeant</i>   | <i>director</i> (as opposed to executant), <i>leader</i> or <i>ruler</i> (of a political party, State, etc.), <i>manager</i> (of an enterprise, etc.).                                  |



|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>entreprise</i>    | <i>enterprise</i> (in Eastern or Western countries), <i>business</i> , <i>business enterprise</i> , <i>company</i> or <i>firm</i> (in Western countries exclusively).  |
| <i>étatisation</i>   | <i>statification</i> (complete nationalization).   |
| <i>executant</i>     | <i>executant</i> (of tasks prescribed by a separate stratum of directors or managers in traditional or bureaucratic capitalism).   |
| <i>exécution</i>     | <i>execution</i> , <i>carrying out</i> (of prescribed tasks). Opposed (in traditional or bureaucratic capitalism) to the functions of <i>direction</i> .   |
| <i>gestion</i>       | <i>management</i> (the act of managing). Also: <i>gestion</i> (“workers’ management”) and <i>gestionnaire</i> , which we have usually translated as “self-managerial” (as in “self-managerial activity”).  |
| <i>instauration</i>  | <i>instauration</i> (act of instituting or establishing something anew or for the first time). According to <i>OED</i> , we are reviving (reinstaurating?) a now-obsolete meaning of a seventeenth-century English word. We do so because this term is so important for Castoriadis’s thoughts on creation and institutionalization, especially in <i>IIS</i> . The more contemporary meaning, “the act of restoring” or “restoration”—with all of its political overtones—is exactly the opposite of what is meant here. Thus also, “to instaurate,” etc. |
| <i>parcellaire</i>   | <i>compartmentalized</i> (labor). We have used “compartmentalized worker” (and “compartmentalization”) instead of Marx’s “detail worker” or <i>Teilarbeiter</i> , since the word “detail” is not “detailed” enough, if you will, to describe “a laborer who all his life performs one and the same simple operation [and thus] converts his whole body into the automatic, specialized implement of that operation.” ( <i>Capital</i> , vol. 1, pt. 7, sec. 2, p. 339.) Our phrase is not completely adequate, either.                                     |
| <i>propriété</i>     | <i>ownership</i> or <i>property</i> .  |
| <i>signification</i> | <i>signification</i> . Another term which is developed more fully in <i>IIS</i> and in other later writings. <i>Meaning</i> has been used on occasion, as well as <i>significance</i> when the context suggested it.   |
| <i>technique</i>     | <i>technique</i> . The Greek <i>techné</i> , or “know-how” in the broadest sense, as Castoriadis says at one point. Contrasted with <i>technology</i> , with its socially instituted <i>logos</i> —the specific set of techniques chosen by, and used in, a given society. This distinction is clearly made in the “Socialism Is the Transformation of Work” section of <i>CS II</i> .   |



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