in the global economy, and therefore as a private collective, compelled to buy and sell, to trade with the outside world, thereby becoming in its turn an enterprise which like it or not, had to play its part in regional, national and world competition or else disappear.

One can only rejoice in the fact that half of Spain imploded: what mainstream opinion calls "anarchy" is a necessary condition for revolution, as Marx wrote in his own time. But these movements made their subversive impact on the basis of a centrifugal force. Rejuvenated communitarian ties also locked everyone into their village and their barrio, as if the point were to discover a lost world and a degraded humanity, to counterpose the working-class neighbourhood to the metropolis, the self-managed commune to the vast capitalist domain, the countryside of the common folk to the commercialized city, in a word the poor to the rich, the small to the large and the local to the international, all the while forgetting that a co-operative is often the longest road to capitalism.

There is no revolution without the destruction of the state. But how? Beating off armed bands, getting rid of state structures and habits, setting up new modes of debate and decision — all these tasks are impossible if they do no go hand in hand with communisation. We don't want "power", we want the power to change all of life. As an historical process extending over generations, can one imagine over such a time frame continuing to pay wages for food and lodging? If the revolution is supposed to be political first and social later, it would create an apparatus whose sole function would be the struggle against the supporters of the old world, i.e. a negative function of repression, a system of control resting on no other content than its "programme" and its will to realise communism the day that conditions finally allow for it. This is how a revolution ideologises itself and legitimises the birth of a specialised stratum assigned to oversee the maturation and the expectation of the ever-radiant day after tomorrow. The very stuff of politics is

Endnotes 1

Preliminary Materials for a Balance Sheet of the 20th Century

Various Authors

2008

stroyed from within or violently suppressed by the fascists… or the Republicans. In Aragon, the column of the Stalinist Lister made this a speciality. Entering the village of Calanda, his first act was to write on a wall: "Collectivisations are theft."

Collectivise Or Communise?

Ever since the First International, anarchism has counterposed the collective appropriation of the means of production to Social Democratic statism. Both visions, nonetheless, have the same starting point: the need for collective management. The problem is: management of what? Of course, what Social Democracy carried out from above, bureaucratically, the Spanish proletarians practised at the base, armed, with each individual responsible to everyone, thereby taking the land and the factories away from a minority specialised in the organising and exploitation of others. The opposite, in short, of the co-management of the Coal Board by socialist or Stalinist union officials. Nevertheless, the fact that a collectivity, rather than the state or a bureaucracy, takes the production of its material life into its own hands does not, by itself, do away with the capitalist character of that life.

Wage labour means the passage of an activity, whatever it might be, ploughing a field or printing a newspaper, through the form of money. This money, while it makes the activity possible, is expanded by it. Equalising wages, deciding everything collectively, and replacing currency by coupons has never been enough to do away with wage labour. What money brings together cannot be free, and sooner or later money becomes its master.

Substituting association for competition on a local basis was a guaranteed recipe for disaster. Because if the collective did abolish private property within itself, it also set itself up as a distinct entity and as a particular element among others

it entails more than the replacement of one instrument for measuring value with another one (such as labour coupons). Like most radical groups, whether they called themselves Marxist or anarchist, Spanish proletarians did not see money as the expression and abstraction of real relationships, but as a tool of measurement, an accounting device, and they reduced socialism to a different management of the same categories and fundamental components of capitalism.

The failure of the measures taken against commodity relations was not due to the power of the UGT (which was opposed to the collectivisations) over the banks. The closing of private banks and of the central bank puts an end to mercantile relations only if production and life are organised in a way no longer mediated by the commodity, and if such a communal production and life gradually come to dominate the totality of social relationships. Money is not the "evil" to be removed from an otherwise "good" production, but the manifestation (today becoming increasingly immaterial) of the commodity character of all aspects of life. It cannot be destroyed by eliminating signs, but only when exchange withers away as a social relationship.

In fact, only agrarian collectives managed to do without money, and they often did so with the help of local currencies, with coupons often being used as "internal money". Sometimes money was handed over to the collective. Sometimes workers were given vouchers according to the size of their families, not to the amount of work done ("to each according to their need"). Sometimes money played no part: goods were shared. An egalitarian spirit prevailed, as well as a rejection of "luxury".[20] However, unable to extend non-commodity production beyond different autonomous zones with no scope for global action, the soviets, collectives and liberated villages were transformed into precarious communities, and sooner or later were either de-

[20] Franz Borkenau, *The Spanish Cockpit* (Faber & Faber, 1937).

Contents

Communist measures could have undermined the social bases of the two states (Republican and Nationalist), if only by solving the agrarian question: in the 1930's, more than half of the population went hungry. A subversive force erupted, bringing to the fore the most oppressed strata, those farthest from "political life" (e.g. women), but it could not go all the way and eradicate the system root and branch.

At the time, the workers' movement in the major industrial countries corresponded to those regions of the world which had been socialised by a total domination of capital over society, where communism was both closer at hand as a result of this socialisation, and at the same time farther away because of the dissolution of all relations into commodity form. The new world, in these countries, was most commonly conceived as a worker's world, even as an industrial one.

The Spanish proletariat, on the contrary, continued to be shaped by a capitalist penetration of society that was more quantitative than qualitative. From this reality it drew both its strength and its weakness, as attested by the tradition and demands for autonomy represented by anarchism.

> "In the last hundred years, there has not been a single uprising in Andalusia which has not resulted in the creation of communes, the sharing out of land, the abolition of money and a declaration of independence … the anarchism of the workers is not very different. They too demand, first of all, the possibility of managing their industrial community or their union themselves, and then the reduction of working hours and of the effort required from everyone …"[19]

One of the main weaknesses was the attitude towards money. The "disappearance of money" is meaningful only if

[19] Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth* (Cambridge, 1990).

were later reabsorbed by the state they allowed to remain intact. The first months of a revolution already ebbing, but whose extent still concealed its failure, looked like a splintering process: each region, commune, enterprise, collective and municipality escaped the central authority without actually attacking it, and set out to live differently. Anarchism, and even the regionalism of the POUM, express this Spanish originality, which is wrongly grasped if one sees only the negative side of this "late" capitalist development. Even the ebb of 1937 did not eradicate the élan of hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants who took over land, factories, neighbourhoods, villages, seizing property and socialising production with an autonomy and a solidarity in daily life that struck both observers and participants.[18] Communism is also the re-appropriation of the conditions of existence.

Sad to say, if these countless acts and deeds, sometimes extending over several years, bear witness (as do, in their own way, the Russian and German experience) to a communist movement remaking all of society, and to its formidable subversive capacities when it emerges on a large scale, it is equally true that its fate was sealed from the summer of 1936 onward. The Spanish Civil War proved both the revolutionary vigour of communitarian bonds and forms which have been penetrated by capital but which are not yet daily reproduced by capital, and also their impotence, taken by themselves, in bringing off a revolution. The absence of an assault against the state condemned the establishment of different relationships to a fragmentary self-management preserving the content and often the forms of capitalism, notably money and the division of activities by individual enterprises. Any persistence of wage-labour perpetuates the hierarchy of functions and incomes.

[18] Among others: Orwell, and Low & Brea, *Red Spanish Notebook*, (City Lights, 1979).

the Spanish tradition of popular autonomy, and the gap between the people and the state which made itself manifest in the anti-Napoleonic war, and then in the revolutions of the 19th century, which renewed age-old communal resistance to the power of the dynasty. The absolute monarchy, he observed, did not shake up various strata to forge a modern state, but rather left the living forces of the country intact. Napoleon could see Spain as a "cadaver,

> … but if the Spanish state was indeed dead, Spanish society was full of life" and "what we call the state in the modern sense of the word is materialised, in reality, only in the army, in keeping with the exclusive "provincial" life of the people."[17]

In the Spain of 1936, the bourgeois revolution had been made, and it was vain to dream of scenarios such as 1917, not to mention 1848 or 1789. But if the bourgeoisie dominated politically, and capital dominated economically, they were nowhere near the creation of a unified internal market and a modern state apparatus, the subjugation of society as a whole, and the domination of local life and its particularism. For Marx in 1854 a "despotic" government coexisted with a lack of unity that extended to the point of different currencies and different systems of taxation: his observation still had some validity eighty years later. The state was neither able to stimulate industry nor carry out agrarian reform; it could neither extract from agriculture the profits necessary for capital accumulation, nor unify the provinces, nor less keep down the proletarians of the cities and the countryside.

It was thus almost naturally that the shock of July '36 gave rise, on the margins of political power, to a social movement whose real expressions, while containing communist potential,

[17] Marx, cited by Marie Laffranque, 'Marx et l'Espagne' (*Cahiers de l'ISEA*, série S. n°15).

The CNT's ultimate justification of its role comes down to the idea that the government no longer really had power, because the workers' movement had taken power de facto.

> "...the government has ceased to be a force oppressing the working-class, in the same way that the state is no longer the organism dividing society into classes. And if CNT members work within the state and government, the people will be less and less oppressed."[16]

No less than Marxism, anarchism fetishizes the state and imagines it as being incarnated in a place. Blanqui had already thrown his little armed flock into attacks on city halls or on barracks, but he at least never claimed to base his actions on the proletarian movement, only on a minority that would awaken the people. A century later, the CNT declared the Spanish state to be a phantom relative to the tangible reality of the "social organisations" (i.e. militias, unions). But the existence of the state, its *raison d'être,* is to paper over the shortcomings of "civil" society by a system of relations, of links, of a concentration of forces, an administrative, police, judicial, and military network which goes "on hold" as a backup in times of crisis, awaiting the moment when a police investigator can go sniffing into the files of the social worker. The revolution has no Bastille, police station or governor's mansion to "take": its task is to render harmless or destroy everything from which such places draw their substance.

The Rise And Decline Of The Collectivisations

The depth and breadth of the industrial and agrarian socialisations after July 1936 was no historical fluke. Marx noted

[16] *Solidaridad Obrera*, November 1936.

Bring Out Your Dead

> "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living... The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of the past in order to smother their own content. In order to arrive at its own content, the revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead."[1]

If this was true when Marx wrote this passage, when one could only speak of communism in the future tense, it is all the more so of today, now that anarchists and communists can speak of their own "histories", indeed seem to speak of little else. Marxism itself is now a tradition of dead generations, and even latter-day situationists seem to have difficulty in "leaving the twentieth century."[2]

We write this not from any special infatuation with the present, or any resultant desire to bring communist theory "up-to-date". The twenty-first century — just as much as the previous one — is formed by the contradiction between labour and

[1] Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852 (MECW 11), pp. 103–106. All references to the works of Marx and Engels are to the Lawrence & Wishhart *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (MECW).

[2] 'Now, The SI' (*IS* no. 9, 1964). Christopher Gray, *Leaving the Twentieth Century: the Incomplete Works of the Situationist International* (Rebel Press 1998).

capital, the separation between work and "life", and the domination of everything by the abstract forms of value. It is therefore just as worth leaving as its predecessor. Yet the "twentieth century" familiar to the situationists, its contours of class relations, its temporality of progress, and its post-capitalist horizons, is obviously behind us. We've become bored with theories of novelty — with post-modernism, post-Fordism, and each new product of the academy — not so much because they fail to capture an essential continuity, but because the capitalist restructuring of the 1970s and 80s *is no longer novel.*

In this preliminary issue of *Endnotes* we have assembled a series of texts (basically an exchange between two communist groups in France) all concerned with the history of revolutions in the twentieth century. As the texts make clear, the history of these revolutions is a history of failure, either because they were crushed by capitalist counter-revolution or because their "victories" took the form of counter-revolutions themselves — setting up social systems which, in their reliance on monetary exchange and wage-labour, failed to transcend capitalism. Yet the latter was not simply a "betrayal"; any more than the former was the result of "strategic errors" or missing "historical conditions." When we address the question of these failures we cannot resort to "what if" counterfactuals — blaming the defeat of revolutionary movements on everything (leaders, forms of organisations, wrong ideas, unripe conditions) other than the movements themselves in their determinate content. It is the nature of this content which is at issue in the exchange which follows.

In publishing such "historical" texts we have no wish to encourage an interest in history per se, nor to revive an interest in the history of revolutions or of the workers' movement. We hope that in considering the content of the struggles of the last century we will help to undermine the illusion that this is somehow "our" past, something to be protected or preserved. Marx's dictum reminds us of the need to shed the dead weight

day cooks will administer society instead of politicians. But these same Marxists can practice the most servile state idolatry, once they come to see the state as the agent of progress or historical necessity. Because they imagine the future as a capitalist socialisation without capitalists, as a world still based on wage labour but egalitarian, democratised and planned, everything prepares them to accept a state (transitional, to be sure) and to go off to war for a capitalist state they see as bad, against another they see as worse.

Anarchism overestimates state power by regarding authority as the main enemy, and at the same time underestimates the state's force of inertia.

The state is the guarantor, but not the creator, of social relationships. It represents and unifies capital, it is neither capital's motor nor its centrepiece. From the undeniable fact that the Spanish masses were armed after July 1936, anarchism deduced that the state was losing its substance. But the substance of the state resides not in institutional forms, but in its unifying function. The state ensures the tie which human beings cannot and dare not create among themselves, and creates a web of services which are both parasitic and real.

In the summer of 1936, the state apparatus may have seemed derelict in Republican Spain, because it only subsisted as a potential framework capable of picking up the pieces of capitalist society and re-arranging them one day. In the meantime, it continued to live, in social hibernation. Then it gained new strength when the relations opened up by subversion were loosened or torn apart. It revived its organs, and, the occasion permitting, assumed control over those bodies which subversion had caused to emerge. What had been seen as an empty shell showed itself capable not only of revival, but of actually emptying out the parallel forms of power in which the revolution thought it had best embodied itself.

when the CNT gave up its anti-parliamentary stand, asking the masses to vote for Republican candidates. The anarchist organisation was turning into "a union aspiring to the conquest of power", that would "inevitably lead to a dictatorship over the proletariat".[14]

From one compromise to the next, the CNT wound up renouncing the anti-statism which was its *raison d'être*, even after the Republic and its Russian ally or master had shown their real faces in May '37, not to mention everything that followed, in the jails and secrets cellars. Like the POUM, the CNT was effective in disarming proletarians, calling on them to give up their struggle against the official and Stalinist police bent on finishing them off. As the GIC put it,

> "...the CNT was among those chiefly responsible for the crushing of the insurrection. It demoralised the proletariat at a time when the latter was moving against democratic reactionaries."[15]

Some radicals even had the bitter surprise of being locked up in a prison administered by an old anarchist comrade, stripped of any real power over what went on in his jail. Adding insult to injury, a CNT delegation which had gone to the Soviet Union requesting material aid did not even raise the issue of the Moscow Trials.

Everything for the anti-fascist struggle!

Everything for cannons and guns!

But even so, some people might object, anarchists by their very nature are vaccinated against the statist virus. Isn't anarchism the arch-enemy of the state? Yes, but...

Some Marxists can recite whole pages of *The Civil War in France* on the destruction of the state machine, and quote the passage from *State and Revolution* where Lenin says that one

[14] *P.I.C.*, German edition, December 1931.

[15] *Räte-Korrespondenz*, June 1937.

of tradition. We would go so far as to say that with the exception of the recognition of the historical break that separates us from them, that we have nothing to learn from the failures of past revolutions — no need to replay them to discover their "errors" or distil their "truths" — for it would in any case be impossible to repeat them. In drawing the balance of this history, in taking it to be over, we are drawing a line that foregrounds the struggles of our own time.

The two parties to the exchange we are publishing, *Troploin* and *Théorie Communiste*, both emerged from a tendency in the early 1970s that, on the basis of new characteristics of the class struggle, critically appropriated the historical ultra-left in both its German / Dutch (council communist) and Italian (Bordigist) varieties as well the more recent work of the Situationist International and *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Before we can introduce the texts themselves we must therefore introduce this common background.

From the Refusal of Work to "Communisation"

When Guy Debord wrote "never work" on the wall of a left-bank alleyway in 1954, the slogan, appropriated from Rimbaud,[3] was still heavily indebted to surrealism and its avant-garde progeny. That is to say, it evoked at least in part a romanticised vision of late nineteenth century bohemia — a world of déclassé artists and intellectuals who had become caught between the traditional relations of patronage and the new cultural marketplace in which they were obliged to vend their wares. The bohemians' negative attitude towards work had been both a revolt against, and an expression of, this

[3] 'We shall never work, oh waves of fire!' Arthur Rimbaud, *Qu'est-ce pour nous, mon cœur* (1872) in: *Œuvres complètes* (Renéville & Mouquet, 1954), p. 124.

polarized condition: caught between an aristocratic disdain for the "professional", and a petit-bourgeois resentment of all other social classes, they came to see all work, their own included, as debased. This posture of refusal was rendered political by the surrealists, who transformed the nihilistic gestures of Rimbaud, Lautréamont, and the dadaists, into the revolutionary call for a "war on work".[4] Yet for the surrealists, along with other unorthodox revolutionaries (e.g. Lafargue, elements of the IWW, as well as the young Marx), the abolition of work was postponed to a utopian horizon on the other side of a revolution defined in its immediacy by the socialist programme of the *liberation* of work — the triumph of the workers' movement and the elevation of the working class to the position of a new ruling class. The goal of the abolition of work would thus paradoxically be achieved through first removing all of work's limits (e.g. the capitalist as a parasite upon labour, the relations of production as a fetter to production) — thereby extending the condition of work to everyone ("those who don't work shall not eat") and rewarding labour with its rightful share of the value it produces (through various schemes of labour-accounting).

This apparent contradiction between means and ends, evinced in the surrealists' troubled relationship with the French Communist Party, was typical of revolutionary

[4] *La Révolution Surréaliste* no. 4 (1925). In practice the surrealists' refusal of work was often restricted to artists, with denunciations of the influence of wage-labour on creativity and demands for public subsidies to pay for their living costs. Even the text co-written by Breton and Trotsky, *Towards a Free Revolutionary Art*, seems to distinguish between two revolutionary regimes, one for artists/ intellectuals and one for workers: 'if, for a better development of the forces of material production, the revolution must build a socialist regime with centralized control, to develop intellectual creation an anarchist regime of individual liberty should from the first be established.' Thus one reason the surrealists neglected the contradiction between the liberation and abolition of labour may have been that they saw the former as a matter for others.

Anarchists In The Government

Social Democracy did not "capitulate" in August 1914, like a fighter throwing in the towel: it followed the normal trajectory of a powerful movement which was internationalist in rhetoric and which, in reality, had become profoundly national long before. The SPD may well have been the leading electoral force in Germany in 1912, but it was powerful only for the purpose of reform, within the framework of capitalism and according to its laws, which included for example accepting colonialism, and also war when the latter became the sole solution to social and political contradictions.

In the same way, the integration of Spanish anarchism in the state in 1936 is only surprising if one forgets its nature: the CNT was a union, an original union undoubtedly but a union all the same, and there is no such thing as an anti-union union. Function transforms the organ. Whatever its original ideals, every permanent organism for defending wage labourers as such becomes a mediator, and then a conciliator. Even when it is in the hands of radicals, even when it is repressed, the institution is bound to escape control of the base and to turn into a moderating instrument. Anarchist union though it may have been, the CNT was a union before it was anarchist. A world separated the rank-and-file from the leader seated at the bosses' table, but the CNT as a whole was little different from the UGT. Both of them worked to modernise and rationally manage the economy: in a word, to socialise capitalism. A single thread connects the socialist vote for war credits in August 1914 to the participation in the government of the anarchist leaders, first in Catalonia (September '36) and then in the Spanish Republic (November '36). As early as 1914, Malatesta had called those of his comrades (including Kropotkin) who had accepted national defence "government anarchists".

The CNT had long been both institutionalised and subversive. The contradiction ended in the 1931 general election,

> "The old democracies play the game of anti-fascist politics in order to let the sleeping dog lie. One must keep the proletarians quiet… at any time, the old democracies feed the working class with anti-fascism… Spain had turned into a slaughter of proletarians of all nationalities, in order to calm down unruly revolutionary workers, and to sell off the products of heavy industry."

The two camps undeniably had quite different sociological compositions. If the bourgeoisie was present on both sides, the immense majority of workers and poor peasants supported the Republic, whereas the archaic and reactionary strata (landed property, small holders, clergy) lined up behind Franco. This class polarisation gave a progressive aura to the Republican state, but it did not disclose the historical meaning of the conflict, any more than the large working-class membership of socialist or Stalinist parties told us all about their nature. Such facts were real, but secondary to the social function of these parties: in fact, because they were grass-roots bodies, they were able to control or oppose any proletarian upsurge. Likewise the Republican army had a large number of workers, but for what, with whom and under whose orders were they fighting? To ask the question is to answer it, unless one it considers possible to fight the bourgeoisie in an alliance with the bourgeoisie.

"Civil war is the supreme expression of the class struggle", Trotsky wrote in *Their Morals and Ours* (1938). Quite… as long as one adds that, from the "Wars of Religion" to the Irish or Lebanese convulsions of our own time, civil war is also, and indeed most often, the form of an impossible or failed social struggle: when class contradictions cannot assert themselves as such, they erupt as ideological or ethnic blocs, still further delaying any human emancipation.

theories throughout the ascendant period of the workers' movement. From anarcho-syndicalists to Stalinists, the broad swathe of this movement put their hopes for the overcoming of capitalism and class society in general in the rising power of the working class within capitalism. At a certain point this workers' power was expected to seize the means of production, ushering in a "period of transition" to communism or anarchism, a period which would witness not the abolition of the situation of the working class, but its generalisation. Thus the final end of the elimination of class society coexisted with a whole gamut of revolutionary means which were premised on its perpetuation.

The Situationist International (SI) inherited the surrealists' opposition between the concrete political means of the liberation of work and the utopian end of its abolition. Their principle achievement was to transpose it from an external opposition mediated by the transition of the socialist programme into an internal one that propelled their conception of revolutionary activity. This latter consisted of a radical rethinking of the liberation of work, along lines which emphasised the refusal of any separation between revolutionary action and the total transformation of life — an idea expressed implicitly in their original project of "creating situations". The importance of this development should not be underestimated, for the "critique of separation" here implied a negation of any temporal hiatus between means and ends (thus of any period of transition), as well as a refusal of any synchronic mediations — insisting on universal (direct democratic) participation in revolutionary action. Yet in spite of this ability to rethink the space and time of revolution, the SI's transcendence of the opposition between the liberation and abolition of work would ultimately consist in collapsing its two poles into one another, into an immediate contradictory unity, transposing the opposition between means and ends into one between *form* and *content*.

After their encounter with the neo-councilist group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* at the beginning of the sixties, the SI wholeheartedly adopted the revolutionary programme of council communism, lauding the council — the apparatus through which workers would self-manage their own production and, together with other councils, grasp the entirety of social power — as the "finally achieved form" of the proletarian revolution. From then on all the potential and all the limits of the SI were contained in the tension between their call to "abolish work" and their central slogan, "all power to the workers' councils." On the one hand the *content* of the revolution was to involve a radical questioning of work itself (and not merely its organisation), with the goal of overcoming the separation between work and leisure; yet on the other hand the *form* of this revolution was to be workers taking over their workplaces and running them democratically.[5]

What prevented the SI from overcoming this contradiction was that the polarities of content and form were both rooted in an affirmation of the workers' movement and the liberation of work. For although the SI appropriated from the young Marx (and the sociological inquiries of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) a preoccupation with the alienation of labour, they nonetheless saw the critique of this alienation as made possible by the

[5] The situationists were aware of this potential critique and tried to deflect it. In 'Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organisation' (*IS* no. 12, 1969) Riesel writes 'it is known that we have no inclination towards workerism of any form whatsoever', but goes on to describe how workers remain the 'central force' within the councils and the revolution. Where they get closest to questioning the affirmation of the proletariat, in the theory of 'generalized self-management', they are at their most incoherent – e.g.: 'only the proletariat, by negating itself, gives clear shape to the project of generalized self-management, because it bears the project within itself subjectively and objectively' (Vaneigem, 'Notice to the Civilized Concerning Generalised Self-Management' *ibid.*). If the proletariat bears the project of self-management 'within itself' then it follows that it must negate this project in 'negating itself'.

they accorded the state a primacy in the anti-Franco struggle, as if it were tactically necessary to pass through the state in order to defeat Franco. In terms of "realism", the recourse to traditional military methods accepted by the far left (including the POUM and the CNT) in the name of effectiveness almost invariably proved ineffective. Sixty years later, people still deplore the fact. But the democratic state is as little suited for armed struggle against fascism as it is for stopping its peaceful accession to power. States are normally loath to deal with social war, and normally fear rather than encourage fraternisation. When, in Guadalajara, the anti-fascists addressed themselves as workers to the Italian soldiers sent by Mussolini, a group of Italians defected. Such an episode remained the exception.

From the battle for Madrid (March '37) to the final fall of Catalonia (February '39), the cadaver of the aborted revolution decomposed on the battlefield. One can speak of war in Spain, not of revolution. This war wound up having as its first function the resolution of a capitalist problem: the constitution in Spain of a legitimate state which succeeded in developing its national capital while keeping the popular masses in check. In February 1939, the Surrealist and (then) Trotskyist Benjamin Péret analysed the consummation of the defeat as follows:

> "The working class… having lost sight of its own goals, no longer sees any urgent reason to be killed defending the bourgeois democratic clan against the fascist clan, i.e. in the last analysis, for the defence of Anglo-French capital against Italo-German imperialism. The civil war increasingly became an imperialist war."[13]

That same year, Bruno Rizzi made a similar comment in his essay on "collective bureaucratism" in the USSR:

[13] *Clé*, 2nd issue.

> populations, the partisan war was next carried on by guerrilla bands, of which whole districts formed the reserve, and terminated in corps francs continually on the point of dwindling into banditti, or sinking down to the level of standing regiments."[12]

For 1936, as for 1808, the evolution of the military situation cannot be explained exclusively or even mainly by the art of war, but flows from the balance of political and social forces and its modification in an anti-revolutionary direction. The compromise evoked by Durruti, the necessity of unity at any cost, could only hand victory first to the Republican state (over the proletariat) and then to the Francoist state (over the Republic).

There was the beginning of a revolution in Spain, but it turned into its opposite as the proletarians, convinced that they had effective power, placed their trust in the state to fight against Franco. On that basis, the multiplicity of subversive initiatives and measures taken in production and in daily life were doomed by the simple and terrible fact that they took place in the shadow of an intact state structure, which had initially been put on hold, and then reinvigorated by the necessities of the war against Franco, a paradox which remained opaque to most revolutionary groups at the time. In order to be consolidated and extended, the transformations without which revolution becomes an empty word had to pose themselves as antagonistic to a state clearly designed as the adversary.

The trouble was, after July 1936, dual power existed in appearance only. Not only did the instruments of proletarian power which emerged from the insurrection, and those which subsequently oversaw the socialisations, tolerate the state, but

[12] Marx, *Revolutionary Spain*, 1854 (MECW 13), p. 422.

technological prosperity of modern capitalism (the "leisure society" potentials of automation) and the battalions of the workers' movement who were capable of both compelling (in their day to day struggles) and appropriating (in their revolutionary councils) these technical advances. It was thus on the basis of an existing workers' power at the points of production that they saw the abolition of work as becoming possible, both from a technical and organisational standpoint. In transposing the techniques of the cyberneticians and the gestures of the bohemian anti-artist into the trusted, calloused hands of the organised working class, the situationists were able to imagine the abolition of work as the *direct* result of its liberation; that is, to imagine the overcoming of alienation as a result of an immediate technical-creative restructuring of the workplace by the workers themselves.

In this sense the SI's theory represents the last sincere gesture of faith in a revolutionary conception of self-management integral to the programme of the liberation of work. But its critique of work would be taken up and transformed by those who sought to theorise the new struggles that emerged when this programme had entered into irreversible crisis in the 1970s. The latter would understand this critique as rooted not in an affirmation of the workers' movement, but in new forms of struggles which coincided with its decomposition. However, in the writings of *Invariance, La Vielle Taupe, Mouvement Communiste* and others, the attempt to overcome the central contradiction of the SI would first be expressed in a critique of "formalism", the privileging of form over content, within the ideology of council communism.

The Critique of Councilism

Contrary to the instructions of the SI, the workers who took part in the mass strike of May '68 in France did not seize the

means of production, form councils, or try to run the factories under workers' control.[6] In the vast majority of occupied workplaces workers were content to leave all the organisation in the hands of their union delegates, and the latter often had trouble in convincing workers to show up to the occupation assemblies to vote for the continuation of the strike.[7] In the most important class struggles of the ensuing years, most notably those in Italy, the council form, consistently the epitome of proletarian radicalism in the foregoing cycle (Germany '19, Italy '21, Spain '36, Hungary '56), was absent. Yet these years paradoxically saw a rise in the ideology of councilism, as the perception of an increasingly unruly working class and the decreasing viability of the old organisations seemed to suggest that the only thing missing was the form most adequate to spontaneous and non-hierarchical struggles. In this context groups like Informations Correspondance Ouvrieres (ICO) in France, Solidarity in England, Root and Branch in the US, and to some extent the *operaisti* current in Italy, managed to revive an interest in the German/Dutch Left through blaming the old enemies of councilism — all the left parties and unions, all the "bureaucrats" in the language of the SI — for the failure of each new insurgency.

It would not take long for this perspective to be challenged, and this challenge would initially take the form of a revival of the *other* left-communist tradition. Under the intellectual leadership of Amadeo Bordiga, the Italian Left had long criticised council communism (which in "Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder" Lenin lumped together with the Italian Left) for its championing of form over content, and its uncritical

[6] The SI would later reveal the extent of their self-delusion by retrospectively claiming that workers had been 'objectively at several moments only an hour away' from setting up councils during the May events. 'The Beginning of an Era' (*IS* no. 12, 1969).

[7] Bruno Astarian, *Les grèves en France en mai-juin 1968*, (Echanges et Mouvement 2003).

arm the people. Disappointment and suspicions undermined morale. The war was increasingly in the hands of specialists. Finally, the Republic increasingly lost ground as all social content and revolutionary appearances faded away in the anti-fascist camp.

Reducing the revolution to war simplifies and falsifies the social question into the alternative of winning or losing, and in being "the strongest". The issue becomes one of having disciplined soldiers, superior logistics, competent officers and the support of allies whose own political nature gets as little scrutiny as possible. Curiously, all this means taking the conflict further from daily life. It is a peculiar quality of warfare that, even for its enthusiasts, no one wants to lose but everyone wants it to end. In contrast to revolution, except in the case of defeat, war does not cross my doorstep. Transformed into a military conflict, the struggle against Franco ceased to be a personal commitment, lost its immediate reality, and became a mobilisation from above, like in any other war situation. After January 1937, voluntary enlistments tapered off, and the civil war, in both camps, came to depend mainly on compulsory military service. As a result a militia man of July 1936 leaving his column a year later, disgusted with Republican politics, could be arrested and shot as a "deserter"!

In different historical conditions, the military evolution from insurrection to militias and then to a regular army is reminiscent of the anti-Napoleonic "guerrilla" warfare (the term was borrowed from Spanish at the time) described by Marx:

> "By comparing the three periods of guerrilla warfare with the political history of Spain, it is found that they represent the respective degrees into which the counter-revolutionary spirit of the Government had succeeded in cooling the spirit of the people. Beginning with the rise of whole

the very time, moreover, the French Popular Front not only refused to grant any reform worthy of any name to its colonial subjects, but dissolved the Etoile Nord-Africaine, a proletarian movement in Algeria.

Everyone knows that the policy of "non-intervention" in Spain was a farce. One week after the putsch London announced its opposition to any arms shipment to what was then the legal Spanish government, and its neutrality in the event that France would become drawn into a conflict. Democratic England thus put the Republic and fascism on the same level. As a result, the France of Blum and Thorez sent a few planes, while Italy and Germany sent whole divisions with their supplies. As for the International Brigades, controlled by the Soviet Union and the CPs, their military value came at a heavy price, namely the elimination of any opposition to Stalinism in working-class ranks. It was at the beginning of 1937, after the first arms shipments, that Catalonia removed Nin from his post as adviser to the Ministry of Justice.

Rarely has the narrow conception of history as a list of battles, cannons and strategies been more inept in explaining the course of a directly "social" war, shaped as it was by the internal dynamic of anti-fascism. Revolutionary élan initially broke the élan of the nationalists. Then the workers accepted legality: the conflict was stalemated and then institutionalised. From late 1936 onward, the militia columns were bogged down in the siege of Zaragoza. The state armed only the military units it trusted, i.e. the ones which would not confiscate property. By early 1937, in the poorly equipped POUM militias fighting the Francoists with old guns, a revolver was a luxury. In the cities, militia men rubbed shoulders with perfectly outfitted regular soldiers. The fronts got stuck, like the Barcelona proletarians against the cops. The last burst of energy was the Republican victory at Madrid. Soon hereafter, the government ordered private individuals to hand in their weapons. The decree had little immediate effect, but it showed an unabashed will to dis-

conception of democracy.[8] It is this position, filtered through the influence of the dissident Bordigist journal *Invariance*, which underlies Gilles Dauvé's critique of council communism in "Leninism and the Ultraleft", one of the foundational texts of the tendency we are describing.[9] Dauvé accuses council communism of formalism on two counts: their approach to the question of organisation sees the form of organisation as the decisive factor (an "inverted Leninism"), and their conception of post-revolutionary society transforms the form (the councils) into the content of socialism, through depicting the latter as fundamentally a question of management. For Dauvé, as for Bordiga, this was a false question, for capitalism is not a mode of management but a mode of production, in which "managers" of any sort (capitalists, bureaucrats, or even workers) are merely the functionaries through which the law of value is articulated. As Pierre Nashua (*La Vielle Taupe*) and Carsten Juhl (*Invariance*) would also later argue, such a preoccupation with form over content effectively replaces the communist goal of the destruction of the economy with a mere opposition to its management by the bourgeoisie.[10]

[8] e.g.: '[T]he formulae 'workers' control' and 'workers' management' are lacking in any content. … The 'content' [of socialism] won't be proletarian autonomy, control, and management of production, but the disappearance of the proletarian class; of the wage system; of exchange — even in its last surviving form as the exchange of money for labour-power; and, finally, the individual enterprise will disappear as well. There will be nothing to control and manage, and nobody to demand autonomy from.' Amadeo Bordiga, *The Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism (1957)* (ICP, 1972).

[9] First published in English in *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement* (Black and Red, 1974).

[10] Pierre Nashua (Pierre Guillaume), *Perspectives on Councils, Workers' Management and the German Left* (La Vielle Taupe 1974). Carsten Juhl, 'The German Revolution and the Spectre of the proletariat' (*Invariance* Series II no. 5, 1974).

Critique of Work Redux

In itself this critique of council communism could only lead to reworking the canonical theses of the Italian Left, either through an immanent critique (*a la Invariance*) or by developing a sort of Italo-Germanic hybrid (*a la Mouvement Communiste*). What provided the impetus for a new conception of revolution and communism (as *communisation*) was not simply an understanding of the content of communism derived from a close reading of Marx and Bordiga, but also the influence of a whole wave of class struggles of the late sixties and early seventies which would give a new meaning to "the refusal of work" as a specific content of the revolution.

By the early 1970s journalists and sociologists began to speak of a "revolt against work" afflicting an entire new generation of workers in traditional industries, with rapidly rising rates of absenteeism and sabotage, as well as a widespread disregard for the authority of the union. Commentators variously blamed: the feeling of expendability and insecurity brought about by automation; the increasing assertiveness of traditionally oppressed minorities; the influence of an anti-authoritarian counter-culture; the power and sense of entitlement afforded by the prolonged post-war boom and its hard-won "social wage". Whatever the reason for these developments, what seemed to characterize the new struggles was a breakdown in the traditional forms through which workers sought to gain control over the labour process, leaving only the expression of an apparent desire to work less. For many of those who had been influenced by the SI, this new proletarian "assault" was characterized by a "refusal of work" shorn of the techno-utopian and bohemian-artistic elements which the SI had never been able to abandon. Groups like *Négation* and *Intervention Communiste* argued that it was not only the power of the union which was being undermined in these struggles, but the entire Marxist and Anarchist programme of

ical weapons in the hands of the bourgeoisie behind the lines, and moreover meant depriving military action itself of the initial vigour it drew from another terrain, the only one where the proletariat has the upper hand. As the "Dutch Left" wrote:

> "If the workers really want to build up a defence front against the Whites, they can only do so by taking over political power themselves, instead of leaving it in the hands of a Popular Front government. In other words, defending the revolution is only possible through the dictatorship of the proletariat, and not through the collaboration of all anti-fascist parties … Proletarian revolution revolves around the destruction of the old state machine, and the exercise of the central functions of power by the workers themselves."[11]

In the summer of 1936, far from having decisive military superiority, the nationalists held no major city. Their main strength lay in the Foreign Legion and in the Moroccan "Moors". In 1912, Morocco had been split by France and Spain into two protectorates, but had long since rebelled against the colonial dreams of both countries. The Spanish royal army had been badly defeated there in 1921, largely due to the defection of Moroccan troops. Despite Franco-Spanish collaboration, the Rif war (in which a general named Franco had distinguished himself) ended only when Abd el-Krim surrendered in 1926. Ten years later, the announcement of immediate and unconditional independence for Spanish Morocco would, at minimum, have stirred up trouble among the shock troops of reaction. The Republic obviously gave short shrift to this solution, under a combined pressure from conservative milieus and from the democracies of England and France, which had little enthusiasm for the possible break-up of their own empires. At

[11] *P.I.C.*, published by the GIC, Amsterdam, October 1936

> "The militarisation of the militias has been decreed. If this has been done to frighten us, to impose on us an iron discipline, this is a mistaken policy. We challenge those who have issued this decree to come to the front and see for themselves our moral and our discipline and compare it with the moral and discipline in the rear. We will not accept dictated discipline. We are doing our duty. Come to the front to see our organisation! Later we shall come to Barcelona to examine your discipline, your organisation and your control!
>
> "There is no chaos at the front, no lack of discipline. We all have a strong sense of responsibility. We know what you have entrusted us with. You can sleep quietly. But remember we have left Barcelona in your hands. We demand responsibility and discipline from you too. Let us prove our capacity to prevent the creation of new differences after our war against fascism. Those who want their movement to be the strongest are working in the wrong direction. Against tyranny there is only one front possible, one organisation and only one sort of discipline."[10]

Listeners would think that a revolution had actually taken place, politically and socially, and just needed its military completion: smashing the fascists. Durruti and his comrades embodied an energy which had not waited for 1936 to storm the existing world. But all the combative will in the world is not enough when workers aim all their blows against one particular form of the state, and not against the state as such. In mid-1936, accepting a war of fronts meant leaving social and polit-

[10] *Boletín de Información*, CNT-ait-FAI, Via Layetana, 32 y 34, Barcelona, November 11, 1936.

the liberation of work and the triumph of "workers' power". Far from liberating their work, bringing it under their own control, and using it to seize control of society through self-managing their workplaces, in the French May and the subsequent "creeping May" in Italy, the "critique of work" took the form of hundreds of thousands of workers deserting their workplaces. Rather than an indication that struggles hadn't gone far enough, the absence of workers' councils during this period was thus understood as an expression of a rupture with what would come to be known as "the old workers' movement."

The Concept of Communisation

Just as it had been influential in spreading the above-mentioned critique of councilism, the dissident Bordigist journal *Invariance* was an important forerunner of critical reflection on the history and function of the workers' movement. For *Invariance* the old workers' movement was integral to a development of capitalism from a stage of merely "formal" to one of "real domination." The workers' failures were necessary since it was capital that constituted their organizing principle:

> "The example of the German, and above all, of the Russian revolutions, shows that the proletariat was fully capable of destroying a social order which presented an obstacle to the development of the productive forces, and thus to the development of capital, but that at the moment that it became a matter of establishing a different community, it remained a prisoner of the logic of the rationality of the development of those

> productive forces, and confined itself within the problem of managing them."[11]

Thus a question that for Bordiga had been one of theoretical and organisational error came for Camatte to define the historic function of the workers' movement within capitalism. The self-liberation of the working class meant only the development of the productive forces, since the principle productive force was the working class itself. One did not need to follow Camatte into the wilderness[12] in order to agree with this estimation. After all, by the 1970s it was clear that in the East the workers' movement had been integral, at least at the beginning, to an unprecedented rise in the productive capacity of the socialist states; whilst in the West workers' struggles for better conditions had played a key role in bringing about the post-war boom and the resulting global expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Yet for many the crisis of the institutions of the workers' movement in the 1970s showed that this purely capitalist function was itself coming into crisis, and workers would be able to shed the burden of this history. For *Mouvement Communiste*, *Négation, Intervention Communiste,* and others the breakdown of the old workers' movement was something to be celebrated, not because the corrupt leadership of the workers' organisations would no longer be able to restrain the autonomy of the masses, but because such a shift represented a transcendence of the historical function of the workers' movement, a transcendence that would mark the reemergence of the *communist movement*, the "real movement which abolishes the present state of things".[13] And it did so in an immediate sense, for the riots and wildcat strikes of that decade were read

[11] Jacques Camatte, 'Proletariat and Revolution' (*Invariance* Series II no. 6, 1975).

[12] Camatte, particularly through his influence on Fredy Perlman, would go on to become a principle inspiration for primitivist thought — see *This World We Must Leave: and Other Essays* (Autonomedia, 1995).

[13] Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology* (MECW 5), p. 49.

have meant completing the revolution in the Republican areas as well. But even Durruti did not seem to realise that the state was everywhere still intact. As his column (70% of whose members were anarchists) advanced, it extended the collectivisations: the militias helped the peasants and spread revolutionary ideas. Yet however much Durruti declared that "these militias will never defend the bourgeoisie" they did not attack it either. Two weeks before his death he delivered a speech broadcast on November 4, 1936:

> "At the front and in the trenches there is only one idea and one aim — the destruction of fascism.
>
> "We call on the Catalan people to stop all internal conflicts and intrigues, to forget all jealousy and politics and to think of the war only. The politicians are only playing tricks to secure for themselves an agreeable life. This dubious art must be replaced by the art to work. The people of Catalonia must be worthy of their brothers fighting at the front. If the workers of Catalonia have taken the supreme task to fight at the different fronts, those living in towns and cities will also have to be mobilised to do their share. Our heroic militia, ready to lie down their lives on the battlefield want to be assured whom they have behind them. They feel that no one should be deterred from their duty because of lack of wage increase or shorter hours of work. Today all toilers and especially those of the CNT must be ready for the utmost sacrifices. For in that way alone can we hope to triumph over fascism.
>
> "I address myself to all organisations, asking them to bury their conflicts and grudges…

Franco".[9] From then on, the only issue was fighting for a fascism less bad than the opposing one…

War Devours The Revolution

Power does not come any more from the barrel of a gun than it comes from a ballot box. No revolution is peaceful, but its "military" dimension is never central. The question is not whether the proles finally decide to break into the armouries, but whether they unleash what they are: commodified beings who no longer can and no longer want to exist as commodities, and whose revolt explodes capitalist logic. Barricades and machine guns flow from this "weapon". The greater the change in social life, the less guns will be needed, and the less casualties there will be. A communist revolution will never resemble a slaughter: not from any nonviolent principle, but because revolution subverts more (soldiers included) than it actually destroys.

To imagine a proletarian front facing off a bourgeois front is to conceive the proletariat in bourgeois terms, on the model of a political revolution or a war (seizing someone's power, occupying their territory). In so doing, one reintroduces everything that the insurrectionary movement had overwhelmed: hierarchy, a respect for specialists, for knowledge that Knows, and for techniques to solve problems — in short for everything that plays down the role of the common man. In Spain, from the fall of 1936 onward, the revolution dissolved into the war effort and into a kind of combat typical of states: a war of fronts. Soon the working-class "militia man" evolved into a "soldier".

Formed into "columns", workers left Barcelona to defeat the fascists in other cities, starting from Zaragoza. Taking the revolution beyond areas under Republican control, however, would

[9] *Homage to Catalonia*, April 1938. In 1951, it had sold less than 1,500 copies. It was first published in the US in 1952.

by these writers as a total refusal of all the mediations of the workers' movement, not in favour of some other more "democratic" mediation like that of workers' councils, but in a way that posed the immediate production of communist relations as the only possible revolutionary horizon. Thus whereas communism had previously been seen as something that needed to be created *after* the revolution, the revolution was now seen as nothing other than the production of communism (abolishing wage labour and the state). The notion of a period of transition was jettisoned.[14]

In a recent text Dauvé sums up this estimation of the old workers' movement:

> "The workers' movement that existed in 1900, or still in 1936, was neither crushed by fascist repression nor bought off by transistors or fridges: it destroyed itself as a force of change because it aimed at preserving the proletarian condition, not superseding it. … The purpose of the old labour movement was to take over the *same* world and manage it in a new way: putting the idle to work, developing production, introducing workers' democracy

[14] The idea of a 'period of transition', found notably in the political writings of Marx and Engels, had been shared by almost every tendency of the workers' movement. During such a period workers were supposed to seize control of the political (Leninist) or economic (syndicalist) apparatuses and run them in their own interests. This corresponded to a generally held assumption that workers could run their workplaces better than their bosses, and thus that to take over production would equally be to develop it (resolving inefficiencies, irrationalities and injustices). In displacing the communist question (the practical question of the abolition of wage-labour, exchange, and the state) to after the transition, the immediate goal, the revolution, became a matter of overcoming certain 'bad' aspects of capitalism (inequality, the tyranny of a parasitical class, the 'anarchy' of the market, the 'irrationality' of 'unproductive' pursuits…) whilst preserving aspects of capitalist production in a more 'rational' and less 'unjust' form (equality of the wage and of the obligation to work, the entitlement to the full value of one's product after deductions for 'social costs'…).

(in principle, at least). Only a tiny minority, 'anarchist' as well as 'marxist', held that a different society meant the destruction of State, commodity and wage labour, although it rarely defined this as a process, rather as a programme to put into practice *after* the seizure of power…"[15]

Against such a programmatic approach, groups like *Mouvement Communiste*, *Négation,* and *La Guerre Sociale* advocated a conception of revolution as the immediate destruction of capitalist relations of production, or "communisation". As we shall see, the understanding of communisation differed between different groups, but it essentially meant the application of communist measures *within* the revolution — as the condition of its survival and its principle weapon against capital. Any "period of transition" was seen as inherently counter-revolutionary, not just in so far as it entailed an alternative power structure which would resist "withering away" (c.f. anarchist critiques of "the dictatorship of the proletariat"), nor simply because it always seemed to leave unchallenged fundamental aspects of the relations of production, but because the very basis of workers' power on which such a transition was to be erected was now seen to be fundamentally alien to the struggles themselves. Workers' power was just the other side of the power of capital, the power of reproducing workers as workers; henceforth the only available revolutionary perspective would be the abolition of this reciprocal relation.[16]

[15] Gilles Dauvé, 'Out of the Future' in *Eclipse and Reemergence of the Communist Movement* (1997) pp. 12–13.

[16] It should be noted that something like a communisation thesis was arrived at independently by Alfredo Bonanno and other 'insurrectionary anarchists' in the 1980s. Yet they tended to understand it as a lesson to be applied to every particular struggle. As Debord says of anarchism in general, such an idealist and normative methodology 'abandons the historical terrain' in

them legally or otherwise, and to dispose of Nin. A parallel police was established, organised by the NKVD and the secret apparatus of the Comintern, and answering only to Moscow. Anyone showing the slightest opposition to the Republican state and its main ally, the USSR, could be denounced and hunted down as a "fascist", and all around the world an army of well-meaning, gentle souls would repeat the slander, some from ignorance, others from self-interest, but every one of them convinced that no denunciation was too excessive when fascism was on the march.

The fury unleashed against the POUM was no aberration. By opposing the Moscow Trials, the POUM condemned itself to be destroyed by a Stalinism locked in a merciless world struggle against its rivals for the control of the masses. At the time, not just CP fellow-travellers, but many political parties, lawyers, reporters and even the French League for the Rights of Man came out in endorsement of the guilt of the accused. Sixty years later, mainstream ideology sees these trials as a sign of the Kremlin's mad will to power. As if Stalinist crimes had nothing to do with anti-fascism! Anti-fascist logic will always align itself with the most moderate forces and always turn against the most radical ones.

On the purely political level, May 1937 gave rise to what, a few months before, would have been unthinkable: a Socialist even farther to the right than Caballero: Negrin, heading a government which came down hard on the side of law and order, including open repression against the workers. Orwell — who almost lost his life in the events — realised that the war "for democracy" was obviously over: "that meant that the general movement would be in the direction of some kind of fascism." What remained was a competition between two fascisms, Orwell wrote, with the difference that one was less inhuman than its rival: he therefore clung to the necessity of avoiding the "more naked and developed fascism of Hitler and

The local police, moreover, was in the hands of the PSUC. Confronted by an openly hostile power, the workers finally understood that this power was not their own, that they had given it the gift of their insurrection ten months earlier, and that their insurrection had been turned against them. In reaction to the power grab by the state, a general strike paralysed Barcelona. It was too late. The workers still had the capacity to rise up against the state (this time in its democratic form), but they could no longer push their struggle to the point of an open break.

As always, the "social" question predominated over the military one. Legal authority could not impose itself by street battles. Within a few hours, instead of urban guerrilla warfare, a war of position, a face-off of apartment building against apartment building set in. It was a defensive stalemate in which no one could win because no one was attacking. With its own offensive bogged down, the police would not risk its forces in attacks on buildings held by the anarchists. Broadly speaking, the CP and the state held the centre of the city, while the CNT and the POUM held the working-class districts.

The status quo ultimately won out by political means. The masses placed their trust in the two organisations under attack, while the latter, afraid of alienating the state, got people to go back to work (though not without difficulty) and thereby undermined the only force capable of saving them politically and… "physically". As soon as the strike was over, knowing that it henceforth controlled the situation, the government brought in 6,000 Assault Guards — the elite of the police. Because they accepted the mediation of "representative organisations" and counsels of moderation from the POUM and the CNT, the very same masses who had defeated the fascist military in July 1936 surrendered without a fight to the Republican police in May 1937.

At that point repression could begin. Only a few weeks were necessary to outlaw the POUM, to arrest its leaders, to kill

Communisation and Cycles of Struggle: *Troploin* and *Théorie Communiste*

The milieu in which the idea of communisation emerged was never very unified, and the divisions only grew as time went on. Some ended up abandoning whatever was left of the councilist rejection of the party and returned to what remained of the legacy of the Italian Left, congregating around atavistic sects such as the International Communist Current (ICC). Many others took the questioning of the old workers' movement and the ideal of workers' councils to require a questioning of the revolutionary potential of the working class. In its most extreme form with the journal *Invariance* this led to an abandoning of "the theory of the proletariat", replacing it by a purely normative demand to "leave this world", a world in which the community of capital has, through real domination, supplanted the human community. Yet even among those who didn't go as far, there was an abiding sense that as long as struggles remained attached to the workplace they could only express themselves as a defence of the condition of the working class. In spite of their different approaches, *Mouvement Communiste*, *La Guerre Sociale, Négation,* and their descendants ended up affirming the workplace revolts of the 1970s, and the growth of struggles around reproduction with which they coincided, to the extent that they seemed to escape the constraints of class identity, freeing the "class for-itself" from the "class in-itself", and thus revealing the potential for communisation as the realisation of the true human community. A few people associated with this tendency (notably Pierre Guillaume and Dominique Blanc)

assuming that the adequate forms of practice have all been found (Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Rebel Press, 1992), § 93 p.49). Like a broken clock, such anarchism is always *capable* of telling the right time, but only at a single instant, so that when the time finally comes it will make little difference that it is finally right.

would take the critique of anti-fascism (shared to some extent by all of those who defended the communisation thesis) to an extreme and become entangled in the "Faurisson Affair" of the late-1970s.[17] Another tendency, represented by *Théorie Communiste* (hereafter TC), attempted to historicise the communisation thesis itself, understanding it in terms of changes in class relations which were in the process of undermining the institutions of the workers' movement and working class identity in general. They would go on to conceptualise this change as a fundamental restructuring of the capitalist mode of production in accordance with the termination of one cycle of struggle and the emergence, via a successful counter-revolution, of a new cycle. The distinguishing feature of this new cycle for TC is that it carries within it the potential for communisation as the limit of a class contradiction newly situated at the level of reproduction (see the afterword for a clarification of TC's theory in this respect).[18]

Whilst TC developed their theory of the restructuring at the end of the 1970s, others would follow suit in the 1980s and 90s, and the group *Troploin* (consisting principally of Gilles Dauvé and Karl Nesic) has recently attempted something of that order in "Wither the World" and "In for a Storm". The difference between these conceptions is marked, not least because the latter seems to have been at least partly developed in opposition to the former. The exchange between *Théorie Communiste* and

[17] Robert Faurisson is a bourgeois historian who attracted attention to himself in the late 70s by denying the existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz (though not the Nazi's systematic mass murder of civilians). For this Faurisson was put on trial. For reasons only really known to himself, Pierre Guillaume became a prominent defender of Faurisson and managed to attract several affiliates of *La Vielle Taupe* and *La Guerre Sociale* (notably Dominique Blanc) to his cause. This created an internecine polemic within the Parisian ultra-left which lasted more than a decade.

[18] Other groups which trace their descent from this (loosely defined) tendency in the 1970s: *La Banquise*, *L'Insecurité Sociale*, *Le Brise Glace*, *Le Voyou*, *Crise Communiste*, *Hic Salta*, *La Materielle*, *Temps Critiques*.

of the high command, which steadily integrated them into regular units (a process completed by the beginning of 1937), preferring to wear them down rather than tolerating their autonomy. As for the powerful CNT, it ceded ground to a CP which had been very weak before July 1936 (having 14 MPs in the Popular Front chamber in February, as opposed to 85 socialists), but which was able to insinuate itself into part of the state apparatus and turn the state increasingly to its own advantage against the radicals, and particularly against the militants of the CNT. The question was: who mastered the situation? And the answer was: the state makes subtle and brutal use of its power when it has to.

If the Republican bourgeoisie and the Stalinists lost precious time dismantling the peasant communes, disarming the POUM militias, and hunting down Trotskyist "saboteurs" and other "Hitler agents" at the very moment when anti-fascism was supposed to be throwing everything in the struggle against Franco, they did not do so from a suicidal impulse. For the state and the CP (which was becoming the backbone of the state through the military and police) these operations were not a waste of time. The head of the PSUC supposedly said: "Before taking Zaragoza, we have to take Barcelona." Their main objective was never crushing Franco, but retaining control of the masses, for this is what states are for, and this is how Stalinism got its power. Barcelona was taken away from the proletarians. Zaragoza remained in fascist hands.

Barcelona: May 1937

On May 3, the police attempted to occupy the Telephone Exchange, which was under the control of anarchist (and socialist) workers. In the Catalan metropolis, heart and symbol of the revolution, legal authority stopped at nothing in disarming whatever remained alive, spontaneous and anti-bourgeois.

place their trust in anything beside their own power to change the world. Otherwise, the next day, the next month or the next year, the power whose authority they recognise will take away the guns which they failed to use against it.

> "In fact, the fight in Spain between "legal" government and "rebel forces" is in no way a fight for ideals, but a struggle between determined capitalist groups entrenched in the bourgeois Republic and other capitalist groups … The Spanish cabinet is no different in its principles from the bloody Leroux regime which massacred thousands of Spanish proletarians in 1934 … Spanish workers are now being oppressed with guns in their hands!"[7]

The insurgents did not take on the legal government, in other words the state as it then existed, and all their subsequent actions took place under its auspices. "A revolution had begun but never consolidated", as Orwell wrote. This is the main point which determined the course of an increasingly losing armed struggle against Franco, as well as the exhaustion and destruction by both camps of the collectivisations and socialisations. After the summer of 1936, real power in Spain was exercised by the state and not by organisations, unions, collectivities, committees, etc. Even though Nin, the head of the POUM, was an adviser to the Ministry of Justice, "The POUM nowhere succeeded in having any influence over the police", as one defender of that party admitted.[8] While the workers' militias were indeed the flower of the Republican army and paid a heavy price in combat, they carried no weight in the decisions

[7] *Proletariër*, published by the councilist group in The Hague, July 27, 1936.

[8] Victor Alba, *Spanish Marxism versus Soviet Communism: a History of the POUM* (Transaction Press, 1988).

Troploin we are publishing here took place in the last ten years, and underlying the assessment of the revolutionary history of the twentieth century to be found in these texts, are different conceptions of capitalist restructuring and opposed interpretations of the current period.

The first text, *When Insurrections Die,* is based on an earlier introduction by Gilles Dauvé to a collection of articles from the Italian Left journal *Bilan* on the Spanish Civil War. In this text Dauvé is concerned to show how the wave of proletarian revolts in the first half of the twentieth century were crushed by the vicissitudes of war and ideology. Thus in Russia the revolution is sacrificed to the civil war, and destroyed by the consolidation of Bolshevik power; in Italy and Germany the workers are betrayed by unions and parties, by the lie of democracy; and in Spain it is again the march to war (to the tune of antifascism) which seals the fate of the whole cycle, trapping the proletarian revolution between two bourgeois fronts.

Dauvé doesn't address the later struggles of the 60s and 70s, but it is obvious that judgements from this period, as to e.g. the nature of the workers' movement as a whole, inform his assessment of what was "missing" in this earlier defeated wave of struggles. In their critique of *When Insurrections Die,* TC attack what they consider to be Dauvé's "normative" perspective, in which actual revolutions are counter-posed to what they *could* and *should* have been — to a never-completely-spelled-out formula of a genuine communist revolution. TC broadly agree with Dauvé's conception of revolution (i.e. communisation) but criticise Dauvé for ahistorically imposing it on previous revolutionary struggles as the measure of their success and failure (and thus of failing to account for the historical emergence of the communisation thesis itself). According to TC it follows that the only explanation that Dauvé is capable of giving for the failure of past revolutions is the ultimately tautological one that they didn't go far enough — "the proletarian revolutions failed because the proletarians failed to

make the revolution."[19] In contrast they argue that their own theory is able to give a robust account of the whole cycle of revolution, counter-revolution and restructuring, in which revolutions can be shown to have contained their own counter-revolutions within them as the intrinsic limit of the cycles they emerge from and bring to term.[20]

In the subsequent three texts in the exchange (two by *Troploin* and one by TC) a number of controversies are explored, including the role of "humanism" in *Troploin*'s conception of communisation, and the role of "determinism" in that of TC. Yet for us the most interesting aspect of this exchange, the reason we are publishing it here, is that it constitutes the most frank attempt we have come across to assess the legacy of 20th century revolutionary movements in terms of a conception of communism as neither an ideal or a programme, but a movement immanent to the world of capital, that which abolishes capitalist social relations on the basis of premises currently in existence. It is in order to interrogate these premises, to return to the present — our starting point — that we seek to analyse their conditions of emergence in the foregoing cycles of struggle and revolution.

[19] see below p. 207.

[20] For a more detailed discussion of the differing assumptions at work in this exchange see the Afterword at the end of this issue.

Once again, the unfolding of the insurrection showed that the problem of violence is not primarily a technical one. Victory does not go to the side with the advantage in weaponry (the military) or in numbers (the people), but rather to who dares to take the initiative. Where workers trusted the state, the state remained passive or promised the moon, as happened in Zaragoza. When their struggle was focused and sharp (as in Malaga) the workers won; if it was lacking in vigour, it was drowned in blood (20,000 killed in Seville).

Thus the Spanish Civil War began with an authentic insurrection, but such a characterisation is incomplete. It holds true only for the opening moment: an effectively proletarian uprising. After defeating the forces of reaction in a large number of cities, the workers had the power. But what were they going to do with it? Should they give it back to the republican state, or should they use it to go further in a communist direction?

Created immediately after the insurrection, the Central Committee of Antifascist Militias included delegates from the CNT, the FAI, the UGT (socialist union), the POUM, the PSUC (product of the recent fusion of the CP and the socialists in Catalonia), and four representatives of the *Generalitat*, the Catalan regional government. As a veritable bridge between the workers' movement and the state, and, moreover, tied if not integrated into the Generalitat's Department of Defence by the presence in its midst of the latter's council of defence, the commissar of public order, etc., the Central Committee of the Militias quickly began to unravel.

Of course in giving up their autonomy most proletarians believed that they were, in spite of everything, hanging onto real power and giving the politicians only the facade of authority, which they mistrusted, and which they could control and orient in a favourable direction. Were they not armed?

This was a fatal error. The question is not: who has the guns? But rather: what do the people with the guns do? 10,000 or 100,000 proletarians armed to the teeth are nothing if they

fighting a three-year civil war, without the tremors which had been rising from the social depths for a century.

Spain had no large centre-left bourgeois party like the "Parti Radical" which was the centre of gravity of French politics for over sixty years. Before July 1936, Spanish Social Democracy kept a much more militant outlook in a country where land was often occupied by wage-labourers, where strikes were rampant, where Madrid tram workers tried to manage the workplace, and where crowds stormed jails to free some of the 30,000 political prisoners. As a socialist leader put it: "The possibilities of stabilising a democratic republic in our country are decreasing every day. Elections are but a variant of civil war." (One might add: a variant of how to keep it at bay.)

In the summer of 1936, it was an open secret that a military coup was coming. After giving the rebels every chance to prepare themselves, the Popular Front elected in February was willing to negotiate and perhaps even to surrender. The politicians would have made their peace with the rebels, as they had done during the dictatorship of Primo de Riveira (1932-31), which was supported by eminent socialists (Caballero had served it as a technical counsellor, before becoming Minister of Labour in 1931, and then head of the Republican government from September 1936 to May 1937). Furthermore, the general who had obeyed Republican orders two years earlier and crushed the Asturias insurrection — Franco — couldn't be all that bad.

But the proletariat rose up, blocked the putsch in half of the country, and hung on to its weapons. In so doing, the workers were obviously fighting fascism, but they were not acting as anti-fascists, because their actions were directed against Franco and against a democratic state more unsettled by the masses' initiative than by the military revolt. Three prime ministers came and went in 24 hours before the *fait accompli* of the arming of the people was accepted.

When Insurrections Die

Gilles Dauvé, *Quand Meurent les insurrections.* ADEL, Paris, 1998.
This version, translated by Loren Goldner and revised by the author, first published by Antagonism Press, 1999.

> "If the Russian Revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that both complement each other, the present Russian common ownership of land may serve as the starting point for a communist development."[1]

This perspective was not realised. The European proletariat missed its rendezvous with a revitalised Russian peasant commune.[2]

Brest-Litovsk: 1917 and 1939

Brest-Litovsk, Poland, December 1917: the Bolsheviks proposed peace without annexations to a Germany intent on taking over a large swath of the old Tsarist empire, stretching from

[1] Marx & Engels, Preface to Russian Edition 1882, *Communist Manifesto* (MECW 24), p. 426.

[2] Originally published as *Quand Meurent les Insurrections*, ADEL, Paris, 1998. This version was translated by Loren Goldner, revised by the author, and first published by Antagonism Press, 1999. An earlier version was published in 1979 as a preface to the selection of articles from *Bilan* on Spain 1936-39. Chapters of this preface have been translated in English as *Fascism and Anti-Fascism* by several publishers, for instance Unpopular Books.

Finland to the Caucasus. But in February 1918, the German soldiers, "proletarians in uniform" though they were, obeyed their officers and resumed the offensive against a soviet Russia as if they were still facing the Tsarist army. No fraternisation occurred, and the revolutionary war advocated by the Bolshevik Left proved impossible. In March, Trotsky had to sign a peace treaty dictated by the Kaiser's generals. "We're trading space for time", as Lenin put it, and in fact, in November, the German defeat turned the treaty into a scrap of paper. Nevertheless, practical proof of the international link-up of the exploited had failed to materialise. A few months later, returning to civilian life with the war's end, these same proletarians confronted the alliance of the official workers' movement and the *Freikorps*. Defeat followed defeat: in Berlin, Bavaria and Hungary in 1919; then the Red Army of the Ruhr in 1920; the March Action in 1921…

September 1939. Hitler and Stalin have just carved up Poland. At the border bridge of Brest-Litovsk, several hundred members of the KPD, refugees in the USSR subsequently arrested as "counter-revolutionaries", are taken from Stalinist prisons and handed over to the Gestapo. Years later, one of them would explain the scars on her back — "GPU did it" — and her torn fingernails — "and that's the Gestapo". A fair account of the first half of this century.

1917-37: twenty years that shook the world. The succession of horrors represented by fascism, then World War II and the subsequent upheavals, are the effect of a gigantic social crisis opening with the mutinies of 1917 and closed by the Spanish Civil War.

bourgeois factions orchestrated every act: history is not a play).[6]

The dynamic of a class-divided society is ultimately shaped by the need to unify those classes. When, as happened in Spain, a popular explosion combines with the disarray of the ruling groups, a social crisis becomes a crisis of the state. Mussolini and Hitler triumphed in countries with weak, recently unified nation-states and powerful regionalist currents. In Spain, from the Renaissance until modern times, the state was the colonial armed might of a commercial society it ultimately ruined, choking off one of the pre-conditions of industrial expansion: an agrarian reform. In fact, Spanish industrialisation had to make its way through monopolies, the misappropriation of public funds, and parasitism.

Space is lacking here for a summary of the 19th century crazy quilt of countless reforms and liberal impasses, dynastic squabbles, the Carlist wars, the tragicomic succession of regimes and parties after World War I, and the cycle of insurrections and repressions that followed the establishment of the Republic in 1931. Beneath all these rumblings was the weakness of the rising bourgeoisie, caught as it was between its rivalry with the landed oligarchy and the absolute necessity of containing peasant and worker revolts. In 1936, the land question had not been resolved: unlike France after 1789, the mid-19th century sell-off of the Spanish clergy's lands wound up strengthening a *latifundist* bourgeoisie. Even in the years after 1931, the Institute for Agrarian Reform only used one-third of the funds at its disposal to buy up large holdings. The conflagration of 1936-39 would never have reached such political extremes, including the explosion of the state into two factions

[6] Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution 1936-1939* (Freedom Press 1953). Michael Seidman, *Workers Against Work during the Popular Front* (UCLA 1993).

1933, which had been renamed "Festival of German Labour". It was wasted effort. In the following days, the Nazis liquidated the unions and arrested the militants.

Having been schooled to contain the masses and to negotiate in their name or, that failing, to repress them, the working-class bureaucracy was still fighting the previous war. The labour bureaucrats were not being attacked for their lack of patriotism. What bothered the bourgeoisie was not the bureaucrats' lingering lip service to the old pre-1914 internationalism, but rather the existence of trade-unions, however servile, retaining a certain independence in an era in which even an institution of class collaboration became superfluous if the state did not completely control it.

Barcelona: 1936

In Italy and in Germany, fascism took over the state by legal means. Democracy capitulated to dictatorship, or, worse still, greeted dictatorship with open arms. But what about Spain? Far from being the exceptional case of a resolute action that was nonetheless, and sadly, defeated, Spain was the extreme case of armed confrontation between democracy and fascism in which the nature of the struggle still remained the same clash of two forms of capitalist development, two political forms of the capitalist state, two state structures fighting for legitimacy in the same country.

Objection!! — "So, in your opinion, Franco and a working-class militia are the same thing? The big landowners and impoverished peasants collectivising land are in the same camp?!"

First of all, the confrontation happened only because the workers rose up against fascism. All the contradictions of the movement were manifest in its first weeks: an undeniable class war was transformed into a capitalist civil war (though of course there was no assignment of roles in which the two

Not "Fascism Or Democracy" — Fascism And Democracy

According to current left-wing wisdom, fascism is raw state power and brutal capital unmasked, so the only way to do away with fascism is to get rid of capitalism altogether.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, the analysis usually turns round on itself: since fascism is capitalism at its worst, we ought to prevent it from actually producing its worst, i.e. we ought to fight for a "normal", non-fascist capitalism, and even rally non-fascist capitalists.

Moreover, as fascism is capital in its most reactionary forms, such a vision means trying to promote capital in its most modern, non-feudal, non-militarist, non-racist, non-repressive, non-reactionary forms, i.e. a more liberal capitalism, in other words a more capitalist capitalism.

While it goes on at length to explain how fascism serves the interests of "big business"[3], anti-fascism maintains that fascism could have been averted in 1922 or 1933 anyway, that is without destroying big business, if the workers' movement and/or the democrats had mounted enough pressure to bar Mussolini and Hitler from power. Anti-fascism is an endless comedy of sorrows: if only, in 1921, the Italian Socialist Party and the newly-founded Italian Communist Party had allied with Republican forces to stop Mussolini… if only, at the beginning of the 1930's, the KPD had not launched a fratricidal struggle against the SPD, Europe would have been spared one of the most ferocious dictatorships in history, a second world war, a Nazi empire of almost continental dimensions, the concentration camps, and the extermination of the Jews. Above and beyond its very true observations about classes, the state, and the ties between fascism and big industry, this vision fails to

[3] For example, Daniel Guérin, *Fascism and Big Business* (New International vol. 4 no. 10, 1938)

see that fascism arose out of a two-fold failure: the failure of revolutionaries after World War I, crushed as they were by social-democracy and parliamentary democracy, and then, in the course of the 1920's, the failure of the democrats and social-democrats in managing capital. Without a grasp of the preceding period as well as of the earlier phase of class struggle and its limits, the coming to power, and still more the nature of fascism, remain incomprehensible.

What is the real thrust of fascism, if not the economic and political unification of capital, a tendency which has become general since 1914? Fascism was a particular way of bringing about that unity in countries — Italy and Germany — where, even though the revolution had been snuffed out, the state was unable to impose order, including order in the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Mussolini was no Thiers, with a solid base in power, ordering regular forces to massacre the Communards. An essential aspect of fascism is its birth in the streets, its use of disorder to impose order, its mobilisation of the old middle classes crazed by their own decline, and its regeneration, from without, of a state unable to deal with the crisis of capitalism. Fascism was an effort of the bourgeoisie to forcibly tame its own contradictions, to turn working class methods of mobilisation to its own advantage, and to deploy all the resources of the modern state, first against an internal enemy, then against an external one.

This was indeed a crisis of the state, during the transition to the total domination of capital over society. First, workers' organisations had been necessary to deal with the proletarian upsurge; then, fascism was required to put an end to the ensuing disorder. This disorder was, of course, not revolutionary, but it was paralysing, and stood in the way of solutions which, as a result, could only be violent. This crisis was only erratically overcome at the time: the fascist state was efficient only in appearance, because it forcibly integrated the wage-labour work force, and artificially buried conflicts by projecting them

state machine obeys the authority commanding it. Did the new leaders not enjoy full legitimacy? Did eminent jurists not write their decrees in conformity with the higher laws of the land? In the democratic state — and Weimar was one — if there is conflict between the two components of the binomial, it is not democracy which will win out. In a "state founded on law" — and Weimar was also one — if there is a contradiction, it is law which must bend to serve the state, and never the opposite.

During these few months, what did the democrats do? Those on the right accepted the new dispensation. The Zentrum, the Catholic party of the centre, which had even seen its support increase in the March 1933 elections, voted to give four years of full emergency powers to Hitler, powers which became the legal basis of Nazi dictatorship.

The socialists, for their part, attempted to avoid the fate of the KPD, which had been outlawed on February 28 in the wake of the Reichstag fire. On March 30, 1933, they left the Second International to prove their national German character. On May 17 their parliamentary group voted in support of Hitler's foreign policy.

On June 22, the SPD was dissolved as "an enemy of the people and the state". A few weeks later, the Zentrum was forced to dissolve itself.

The unions followed in the footsteps of the Italian CGL, and hoped to salvage what they could by insisting that they were a-political. In 1932, the union leaders had proclaimed their independence from all parties and their indifference to the form of the state. This did not stop them from seeking an accord with Schleicher, who was chancellor from November 1932 to January 1933, and who was looking for a base and some credible pro-worker demagogy. Once the Nazis had formed a government, the union leaders convinced themselves that if they recognised National Socialism, the regime would leave them some small space. This strategy culminated in the farce of union members marching under the swastika on May Day

the German bourgeoisie, which played "an objectively revolutionary role through its foreign policy". Later, around 1930, the KPD demanded a "national and social liberation" and denounced fascism as a "traitor to the nation". Talk of "national revolution" was so common among German Stalinists that it inspired Trotsky's 1931 pamphlet *Against National-Communism*.

In January 1933, the die was cast. No one can deny that the Weimar Republic willingly gave itself to Hitler. Both the right and the centre had come round to seeing him as a viable solution to get the country out of its impasse, or as a temporary lesser evil. "Big capital", reticent about any uncontrollable upheaval, had not, up to that time, been any more generous with the NSDAP than with the other nationalist and right-wing formations. Only in November 1932 did Schacht, an intimate adviser of the bourgeoisie, convince business circles to support Hitler (who had, moreover, just seen his electoral support slightly decline) because he saw in Hitler a force capable of unifying the state and society. The fact that industrial magnates did not foresee what then ensued, leading to war and defeat, is another question, and in any event they were not notable by their presence in the clandestine resistance to the regime.

On January 30, 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor in complete legality by Hindenburg, who himself had been constitutionally elected president a year earlier with the support of the socialists, who saw in him a rampart against… Hitler. The Nazis were a minority in the first government formed by the leader of the NSDAP.

In the following weeks, the masks were taken off: working-class militants were hunted down, their offices were sacked, and a reign of terror was launched. In the elections of March 1933, held against the backdrop of violence by both the storm-troopers and the police, 288 NSDAP MPs were sent to the Reichstag (while the KPD still retained 80 and the SPD 120).

Naive people might express surprise at the docility with which the repressive apparatus goes over to dictators, but the

into militarist adventure. But the crisis was overcome, relatively, by the multi-tentacled democratic state established in 1945, which potentially appropriated all of fascism's methods, and added some of its own, since it neutralises wage-worker organisations without destroying them. Parliaments have lost control over the executive. With welfare or with workfare, by modern techniques of surveillance or by state assistance extended to millions of individuals, in short by a system which makes everyone more and more dependent, social unification goes beyond anything achieved by fascist terror, but fascism as a specific movement has disappeared. It corresponded to the forced-march discipline of the bourgeoisie, under the pressure of the state, in the particular context of newly created states hard-pressed to constitute themselves as nations.

The bourgeoisie even took the word "fascism" from working class organisations in Italy, which were often called fasci. It is significant that fascism first defined itself as a form of organisation and not as a programme. The word referred both to a symbol of state power (*fasces*, or bundles, borne before high officials in Ancient Rome), and to a will to get people together in bundles (groups). Fascism's only programme is to organise, to forcibly make the components of society converge.

Dictatorship is not a weapon of capital (as if capital could replace it with other, less brutal weapons): dictatorship is one of its tendencies, a tendency realised whenever it is deemed necessary. A "return" to parliamentary democracy, as it occurred in Germany after 1945, indicates that dictatorship is useless for integrating the masses into the state (at least until the next time). The problem is therefore not that democracy ensures a more pliant domination than dictatorship: anyone would prefer being exploited in the Swedish mode to being abducted by the henchmen of Pinochet. But does one have the choice? Even the gentle democracy of Scandinavia would be turned into a dictatorship if circumstances demanded it. The state can only have one function, which it fulfils democratically or dictato-

rially. The fact that the former is less harsh does not mean that it is possible to reorient the state to dispense with the latter. Capitalism's forms depend no more on the preferences of wage workers than they do on the intentions of the bourgeoisie. Weimar capitulated to Hitler with open arms. Léon Blum's Popular Front did not "avoid fascism", because in 1936 France required neither an authoritarian unification of capital nor a shrinking of its middle classes.

There is no political "choice" to which proletarians could be enticed or which could be forcibly imposed. Democracy is not dictatorship, but democracy does prepare dictatorship, and prepares itself for dictatorship.

The essence of anti-fascism consists in resisting fascism by defending democracy: one no longer struggles against capitalism but seeks to pressure capitalism into renouncing the totalitarian option. Since socialism is identified with total democracy, and capitalism with an accelerating tendency to fascism, the antagonisms between proletariat and capital, communism and wage-labour, proletariat and state, are rejected for a counter-position of democracy and fascism presented as the quintessential revolutionary perspective. The official left and far left tell us that a real change would be the realisation, at last, of the ideals of 1789, endlessly betrayed by the bourgeoisie. The new world? Why, it is already here, to some extent, in embryos to be preserved, in little buds to be tended: already existing democratic rights must be pushed further and further within an infinitely perfectible society, with ever-greater daily doses of democracy, until the achievement of complete democracy, or socialism.

Thus reduced to anti-fascist resistance, social critique is enlisted in dithyrambs to everything it once denounced, and gives up nothing less than that shop-worn affair, revolution, for gradualism, a variant on the "peaceful transition to socialism" once advocated by the CPs, and derided, thirty years ago, by anyone

national trade and pacifism, or autarchy laying the foundations of a military expansion. The solution did not necessarily imply a Hitler, but it did presuppose a concentration of force and violence in the hands of central government. Once the centrist-reformist compromise had exhausted itself, the only option left was statist, protectionist and repressive.

A programme of this kind required the violent dismantling of Social Democracy, which in its domestication of the workers had come to exercise excessive influence, while still being incapable of unifying all of Germany behind it. This unification was the task of Nazism, which was able to appeal to all classes, from the unemployed to the industrial tycoons, with a demagogy that even surpassed that of the bourgeois politicians, and an anti-semitism intended to build cohesion through exclusion.

How could the working-class parties have made themselves into an obstacle to such xenophobic and racist madness, after having so often been the fellow travellers of nationalism? For the SPD, this had been clear since the turn of the century, obvious in 1914, and signed in blood in the 1919 pact with the *Freikorps*, who were cast very much in the same warrior mould as their contemporaries, the *fasci*.

Besides, socialists had not been immune to anti-semitism. Abraham Berlau's *The German Social-Democratic Party 1914-1921* (Columbia 1949) describes how many SPD or union leaders, and even the prestigious *Neue Zeit*, openly raved against "foreign" (i.e. Polish and Russian) Jews. In March 1920 the Berlin police (under socialist supervision) raided the Jewish district and sent about 1000 people to a concentration camp. All were freed later, but the labour movement did contribute to the spread of anti-semitism.

The KPD, for its part, had not hesitated to ally with the nationalists against the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. No Comintern theoretician opposed Radek when he stated that "only the working-class can save the nation". The KPD leader Thalheimer made it clear that the party should fight alongside

force contending with the employers and the state, not as an organ absorbed by them. Its vocation is the management of an enormous political, municipal, social, mutualist and cultural network. The KPD, moreover, had quickly constituted its own empire, smaller but vast nonetheless. But as capital becomes more and more organised, it tends to pull together all its different strands, bringing a statist element to the enterprise, a bourgeois element to the trade-union bureaucracy, and a social element to public administration. The weight of working-class reformism, which ultimately pervaded the state, and its existence as a "counter-society" made it a factor of social conservation which capital in crisis had to eliminate. By their defence of wage-labour as a component of capital, the SPD and the unions played an indispensable anti-communist part in 1918-21, but this same function later led them to put the interest of wage-labour ahead of everything else, to the detriment of the reorganisation of capital as a whole.

A stable bourgeois state would have tried to solve this problem by anti-union legislation, by recapturing the "worker fortress", and by pitting the middle classes, in the name of modernity, against the archaism of the proles, as Thatcher's England did much later. Such an offensive assumes that capital is relatively united under the control of a few dominant factions. But the German bourgeoisie of 1930 was profoundly divided, the middle classes had collapsed, and the nation-state was in shambles.

By negotiation or by force, modern democracy represents and reconciles antagonistic interests, to the extent that this is possible. Endless parliamentary crises and real or imagined plots (for which Germany was the stage after the fall of the last socialist chancellor in 1930) in a democracy are the invariable sign of long-term disarray in ruling circles. At the beginning of the 1930's, the crisis whipsawed the bourgeoisie between irreconcilable social and geopolitical strategies: either the increased integration or the elimination of the workers' movement; inter-

serious about changing the world. The retrogression is palpable.

We won't invite ridicule by accusing the left and far left of having discarded a communist perspective which they knew in reality only when opposing it. It is all too obvious that anti-fascism renounces revolution. But anti-fascism fails exactly where its realism claims to be effective: in preventing a possible dictatorial mutation of society.

Bourgeois democracy is a phase in capital's seizure of power, and its extension in the 20th century completes capital's domination by intensifying the isolation of individuals. Proposed as a remedy for the separation between man and community, between human activity and society, and between classes, democracy will never be able to solve the problem of the most separated society in history. As a form forever incapable of modifying its content, democracy is only a part of the problem to which it claims to be the solution. Each time it claims to strengthen the "social bond", democracy contributes to its dissolution. Each time it papers over the contradictions of the commodity, it does so by tightening the hold of the net which the state has placed over social relations.

Even in their own desperately resigned terms, the anti-fascists, to be credible, have to explain to us how local democracy is compatible with the colonisation of the commodity which empties out public space, and fills up the shopping malls. They have to explain how an omnipresent state to which people turn for protection and help, this veritable machine for producing social "good", will not commit "evil" when explosive contradictions require it to restore order. Fascism is the adulation of the statist monster, while anti-fascism is its more subtle apology. The fight for a democratic state is inevitably a fight to consolidate the state, and far from crippling totalitarianism, such a fight increases totalitarianism's stranglehold on society.

Rome: 1919–1922

Fascism triumphed in countries in which the revolutionary assault after World War I matured into a series of armed insurrections. In Italy, an important part of the proletariat, using its own methods and goals, directly confronted fascism. There was nothing specifically anti-fascist about its struggle: fighting capital compelled workers and the young CP (created at Livorno, January 1921, and led by the "Bordigist" faction) to fight both the Black Shirts and the cops of parliamentary democracy.[4]

Fascism is unique in giving counter-revolution a mass base and in mimicking revolution. Fascism turns the call to "transform the imperialist war into civil war" against the workers' movement, and it appears as a reaction of demobilised veterans returning to civilian life, where they are nothing, only held together by collective violence, and bent on destroying everything they imagine to be a cause of their dispossession: subversives, enemies of the nation, etc. In July 1918, Mussolini's paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, added to its title "Veterans' and Producers' Daily".

Thus from the outset fascism became an auxiliary of the police in rural areas, putting down the agricultural proletariat with bullets, but at the same time developing a frenzied anti-capitalist demagogy. In 1919, it represented nothing: in Milan, in the November general election, it got less than 5000 votes, while the socialists got 170,000. Yet it demanded the abolition of the monarchy, of the senate and all titles of nobility, the vote for women, the confiscation of the property of the clergy, and the expropriation of the big landowners and industrialists. Fighting against the worker in the name of the "producer", Mussolini exalted the memory of the Red Week of 1914 (which had seen a wave a riots, particularly in Ancona and Naples), and

[4] Angelo Tasca, *The Rise of Italian Fascism 1918-1922* (Gordon 1976). Phillip Bourrinet, *The Italian Communist Left 1927-45* (ICC 1992).

pointment of Mussolini as head of state. In Germany, a gap of a dozen years broke the continuity and made January 30, 1933 appear as an essentially political or ideological phenomenon, not as the effect of an earlier social earthquake. The popular basis of National Socialism and the murderous energy it unleashed remain mysteries if one ignores the question of the submission, revolt, and control of labour.

The German defeat of 1918 and the fall of the empire set in motion a proletarian assault strong enough to shake the foundations of society, but impotent when it came to revolutionising it, thus bringing Social Democracy and the unions to centre stage as the key to political equilibrium. Their leaders emerged as men of order, and had no scruples about calling in the *Freikorps*, fully fascist groupings with many future Nazis in their ranks, to repress a radical worker minority in the name of the interests of the reformist majority. First defeated by the rules of bourgeois democracy, the communists were also defeated by working-class democracy: the "works councils" placed their trust in the traditional organisations, not in the revolutionaries easily denounced as anti-democrats.

In this juncture, democracy and Social Democracy were indispensable to German capitalism for killing off the spirit of revolt in the polling booth, winning a series of reforms from the bosses, and dispersing the revolutionaries.[5]

After 1929, on the other hand, capitalism needed to eliminate part of the middle classes, and to discipline the proletarians, and even the bourgeoisie. The workers' movement, defending as it did political pluralism and immediate worker interests, had become an obstacle. As mediators between capital and labour, working-class organisations derive their function from both, but also try to remain autonomous from both, and from the state. Social Democracy has meaning only as a

[5] See Serge Bricianer, *Anton Pannekoek and the Workers' Councils* (Telos 1978) and Phillip Bourrinet, *The German/Dutch Left* (NZW 2003).

artificiality, the prostheticisation of man, regimentation of time, social relations increasingly mediated by money and technique: all these alienations passed through the fire of a diffuse and multi-formed critique. Only a superficial backward glance sees this ferment purely through the prism of its inevitable recuperation.

The counter-revolution triumphed in the 1920's only by laying the foundations, in Germany and in the US, of a consumer society and of Fordism, and by pulling millions of Germans, including workers, into industrial, commodified modernity. Ten years of fragile rule, as the mad hyperinflation of 1923 shows. This was followed in 1929 by an earthquake in which not the proletariat but capitalist practice itself repudiated the ideology of progress and an ever-increasing consumption of objects and signs.

Capitalist modernity was questioned twice in ten years, first by proletarians, then by capital. Nazi extremism and its violence were adequate to the depth of the revolutionary movement National-Socialism took over and negated. Like the radicals of 1919-21, Nazism proposed a community of wage-workers, but one which was authoritarian, closed, national, and racial, and for twelve years it succeeded in transforming proletarians into wage-workers and into soldiers.

Fascism grew out of capital, but out of a capital which destroyed old relationships without producing new stable ones brought about by consumerism. Commodities failed to give birth to modern capitalist community.

Berlin: 1919–33

Dictatorship always comes after the defeat of social movements, once they have been chloroformed and massacred by democracy, the leftist parties and the unions. In Italy, several months separated the final proletarian failures from the ap-

hailed the positive role of unions in linking the worker to the nation. Fascism's goal was the authoritarian restoration of the state, in order to create a new state structure capable (in contrast to democracy, Mussolini said) of limiting big capital and of controlling the commodity logic which was eroding values, social ties and work.

For decades, the bourgeoisie had denied the reality of social contradictions. Fascism, on the contrary, proclaimed them with violence, denying their existence between classes and transposing them to the struggle between nations, denouncing Italy's fate as a "proletarian nation". Mussolini was archaic in so far as he upheld traditional values ruined by capital, and modern in so far as he claimed to defend the social rights of the people.

Fascist repression was unleashed after a proletarian failure engineered mainly by democracy and its main fallback options: the parties and unions, which alone can defeat the workers by employing direct and indirect methods in tandem. Fascism's arrival in power was not the culmination of street battles. Italian and German proles had been crushed before, by both ballots and bullets.

In 1919, federating pre-existing elements with others close to him, Mussolini founded his fasci. To counter clubs and revolvers, while Italy was exploding along with the rest of Europe, democracy called for… a vote, from which a moderate and socialist majority emerged. Forty years after these events Bordiga commented:

> "Enthusiastic involvement in the 1919 electoral celebration was tantamount to removing all obstacles on the path of fascism, which was shooting ahead while the masses were put to sleep as they waited for the big parliamentary showdown… Victory, the election of 150 socialist MPs, was won at the cost of the ebb of the insurrectionary movement and of the general political strike, and

the rollback of the gains that had already been won."

At the time of the factory occupations of 1920, the state, holding back from a head-on-assault, allowed the proletariat to exhaust itself, with the support of the CGL (a majority-socialist union), which wore down the strikes when it did not break them openly. The institutionalisation of "workers' control" over the factories, under state supervision, was approved by bosses and unions alike.

As soon as the *fasci*appeared, sacking the *Case di Popolo*, the police either turned a blind eye or confiscated the workers' guns. The courts showed the *fasci* the greatest indulgence, and the army tolerated their exactions when it did not actually assist them. This open but unofficial support became quasi-official with the "Bonomi circular". After being expelled from the socialist party in 1912, with Mussolini's agreement, for supporting Italy's war against Libya, Ivanoe Bonomi held several ministerial posts, and was head of government in 1921-22. His October 20, 1921 circular provided 60,000 demobilised officers to take command of Mussolini's assault groups.

Meanwhile, what were the parties doing? Those liberals allied with the right did not hesitate to form a "national bloc", including the fascists, for the elections of May 1921. In June-July of the same year, confronting an adversary without the slightest scruple, the PSI concluded a meaningless "pacification pact" whose only concrete effect was to further disorient the workers.

Faced with an obvious political reaction, the CGL declared itself a-political. Sensing that Mussolini had power within his grasp, the union leaders dreamed of a tacit agreement of mutual tolerance with the fascists, and called on the proletariat to stay out of the face-off between the CP and the National Fascist Party.

convulsions. The continuity of the state requires the non-continuity of the regime."

Volksgemeinschaft Vs. *Gemeinwesen*

Counter-revolution inevitably triumphs on the terrain of revolution. Through its "people's community" National Socialism would claim to have eliminated the parliamentarism and bourgeois democracy against which the proletariat revolted after 1917. But the conservative revolution also took over old anti-capitalist tendencies (the return to nature, the flight from cities…) that the workers' parties, even the extremist ones, had misestimated by their refusal to integrate the a-classist and communitarian dimension of the proletariat, and their inability to think of the future as anything but an extension of heavy industry. In the first half of the 19th century, these themes were at the centre of the socialist movement's preoccupations, before Marxism abandoned them in the name of progress and science, and they survived only in anarchism and in sects.

Volksgemeinschaft vs. *Gemeinwesen*, people's community or the human community… 1933 was not the defeat, only the consummation of the defeat. Nazism arose and triumphed to defuse, resolve and to close a social crisis so deep that we still don't appreciate its magnitude. Germany, cradle of the largest Social Democracy in the world, also gave rise to the strongest radical, anti-parliamentary, anti-union movement, one aspiring to a "workers'" world but also capable of attracting to itself many other anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist revolts. The presence of avant-garde artists in the ranks of the "German Left" is no accident. It was symptomatic of an attack on capital as "civilisation" in the way Fourier criticised it. The loss of community, individualism and gregariousness, sexual poverty, the family both undermined but affirmed as a refuge, the estrangement from nature, industrialised food, increasing

Marshal Badoglio, who had been a dignitary of the regime ever since his support for the March on Rome, and who wanted to prevent, in his own words, "the collapse of the regime from swinging too far to the left", formed a government which was still fascist but which no longer included the Duce, and turned to the democratic opposition. The democrats refused to participate, making the departure of the king a condition. After a second transitional government, Badoglio formed a third in April 1944, which included the leader of the CP, Togliatti. Under the pressure of the Allies and of the CP, the democrats agreed to accept the king (the Republic would be proclaimed by referendum in 1946). But Badoglio stirred up too many bad memories. In June, Bonomi, who 23 years earlier had ordered the officers to join the fasci, formed the first ministry to actually exclude the fascists. This is how Bonomi, ex-socialist, ex-warmonger, ex-minister, ex-"national bloc" (fascists included) MP, ex-government leader from July 1921 to February 1922, ex-everything, took office for six months as an anti-fascist. Later the situation was reoriented around the tripartite formula (Stalinists + Socialists + Christian Democrats) which would dominate both Italy and France in the first years after the war.

This game of musical chairs, often played by the self-same political class, was the theatre prop behind which democracy metamorphosed into dictatorship, and vice-versa. The phases of equilibrium and disequilibrium in class conflicts brought about a succession of political forms aimed at maintaining the same state, underwriting the same content. No one was more qualified to say it than the Spanish CP, when it declared, out of cynicism or naivety, during the transition from Francoism to democratic monarchy in the mid-70's:

> "Spanish society wants everything to be transformed so that the normal functioning of the state can be assured, without detours or social

Until August 1922, fascism rarely existed outside the agrarian regions, mainly in the north, where it eradicated all traces of autonomous agrarian worker unionism. In 1919, fascists did burn the headquarters of the socialist daily paper, but they held back from any role as strike-breakers in 1920, and even gave verbal support to worker demands: Mussolini took great pains to stand behind the strikers and dissociate himself from troublemakers, i.e. communists. In the urban areas, the *fasci* were rarely dominant. Their "March on Ravenna" (September 1921) was easily routed. In Rome in November 1921 a general strike prevented a fascist congress from taking place. In May 1922 the fascists tried again, and were stopped again.

The scenario varied little. A localised fascist onslaught would be met by a working-class counter-attack, which would then relent (following calls for moderation from the reformist workers' movement) as soon as reactionary pressure tapered off: the proletarians trusted the democrats to dismantle the armed bands. The fascist threat would pull back, regroup and go elsewhere, over time making itself credible to the same state from which the masses were expecting a solution. The proletarians were quicker to recognise the enemy in the black shirt of the street thug than in the "normal" uniform of a cop or soldier, draped in a legality sanctioned by habit, law and universal suffrage. The workers were militant, used guns, and turned many a Labour Exchange or *Casa di Popolo* into a fortress, but stayed nearly always on the defensive, waging a trench war against an ever mobile opponent.

At the beginning of July 1922, the CGL, by a two-thirds majority (against the communist minority's one-third), declared its support for "any government guaranteeing the restoration of basic freedoms". In the same month, the fascists seriously stepped up their attempts to penetrate the northern cities…

On August 1st, the Alliance of Labour, which included the railway workers' union, the CGL and the anarchist USI, called a general strike. Despite broad success, the Alliance officially

called off the strike on the 3rd. In numerous cities, however, it continued in insurrectionary form, which was finally contained only by a combined effort of the police and the military, supported by naval cannon, and, of course, reinforced by the fascists.

Who defeated this proletarian energy? The general strike was broken by the state and the fasci, but it was also smothered by democracy, and its failure opened the way to a fascist solution to the crisis.

What followed was less a coup d'état than a transfer of power with the support of a whole array of forces. The "March on Rome" of the Duce (who actually took the train) was less a showdown than a bit of theatre: the fascists went through the motions of assaulting the state, the state went through the motions of defending itself, and Mussolini took power. His ultimatum of October 24 ("We Want To Become the State!") was not a threat of civil war, but a signal to the ruling class that the National Fascist Party represented the only force capable of restoring state authority, and of assuring the political unity of the country. The army could still have contained the fascist groups gathered in Rome, which were badly equipped and notoriously inferior on the military level, and the state could have withstood the seditious pressure. But the game was not being played on the military level. Under the influence of Badoglio in particular (the commander-in-chief in 1919-21) legitimate authority caved in. The king refused to proclaim a state of emergency, and on the 30th he asked the Duce to form a new government.

The liberals — the same people anti-fascism counts on to stop fascism — joined the government. With the exception of the socialists and the communists, all parties sought a rapprochement with the PNF and voted for Mussolini: the parliament, with only 35 fascist MPs, supported Mussolini's investiture 306-116. Giolitti himself, the great liberal icon of the time, an authoritarian reformer who had been head of

state many times before the war, and then again in 1920-21, whom fashionable thought still fancies in retrospect as the sole politician capable of opposing Mussolini, supported him up to 1924. Democracy not only surrendered its powers to the dictator, but ratified them.

We might add that in the following months, several unions, including those of the railway workers and the sailors, declared themselves "national", patriotic, and therefore not hostile to the regime: repression did not spare them.

Turin: 1943

If Italian democracy yielded to fascism without a fight, the latter spawned democracy anew when it found itself no longer corresponding to the balance of social and political forces.

The central question after 1943, as in 1919, was how to control the working-class. In Italy more than in other countries, the end of World War II shows the class dimension of international conflict, which can never be explained by military logic alone. A general strike erupted at FIAT in October 1942. In March 1943, a strike wave rocked Turin and Milan, including attempts at forming workers' councils. In 1943-45, worker groups emerged, sometimes independent of the CP, sometimes calling themselves "Bordigists", often simultaneously antifascist, *rossi*, and armed. The regime could no longer maintain social equilibrium, just as the German alliance was becoming untenable against the rise of the Anglo-Americans, who were seen in every quarter as the future masters of Western Europe. Changing sides meant allying with the winners-to-be, but also meant rerouting worker revolts and partisan groups into a patriotic objective with a social content. On July 10, 1943, the Allies landed in Sicily. On the 24th, finding himself in a 19-17 minority on the Grand Fascist Council, Mussolini resigned. Rarely has a dictator had to step aside for a majority vote.

certainty, and that nothing ensures its coming and success but proletarian activity.

The fundamental contradiction of our society (proletariat-capital) is only potentially deadly to capitalism if the worker confronts his work, and therefore takes on not just the capitalist, but what capital makes of him, i.e. if he takes on *what he does* and *is*. It's no use hoping for a time when capital, like a worn out mechanism, would find it impossible to function, because of declining profits, market saturation, exclusion of too many proletarians from work, or the inability of the class structure to reproduce itself.

A current subtext runs through much of revolutionary thinking: the more capitalism we have, the nearer we get to communism. To which people like Jacques Camatte retort: *no, the more capitalism we have, the more capitalist we become*. At the risk of shocking some readers, we'd say that the evolution of capital does not take us closer to or farther from communism. From a communist point of view, nothing is positive in itself in the march of capital, as is shown by the fate of classism.

The Rise and Fall of Classism

In practice, "classism" was the forward drive of the working class as a class within capitalist society, where its organisations came to occupy as much social space as possible. Labour set up collective bodies that rivalled with those of the bourgeoisie, and conquered positions inside the State. That took — and still takes — many forms (social-democracy, *CP*s, the *AFL-CIO*…), and also existed in South America, in Asia and parts of Africa.

In theory, classism is the vindication of class difference (and opposition) as an end in itself, as if class war was the same as the emancipation of the workers and of mankind. So it's based exactly on what has to be criticised, as classes are basic con-

not being able, and not wanting, to change anything: it brings together what is separated without going any further. Power is there, it manages, it administers, it oversees, it calms, it represses: it is.

Political domination (in which a whole school of thought sees problem *number one*) flows from the incapacity of human beings to take charge of themselves, and to organise their lives and their activity. This domination persists only through the radical dispossession which characterises the proletarian. When everyone participates in the production of their existence, the capacity for pressure and oppression now in the hands of the state will cease to be operative. It is because wage-labour society deprives us of our means of living, producing and communicating, not stopping short of the invasion of once-private space and of our emotional lives, that the state is all-powerful. The best guarantee against the reappearance of a new structure of power over us is the deepest possible appropriation of the conditions of existence, at every level. For example, even if we don't want everyone generating their own electricity in their basements, the domination of the Leviathan also comes from the fact that energy (a significant term, another word for which is power) makes us dependent on industrial complexes which, nuclear or not, inevitably remain external to us and escape any control.

To conceive the destruction of the state as an armed struggle against the police and the armed forces is to mistake the part for the whole. Communism is first of all activity. A mode of life in which men and women produce their social existence paralyses or reabsorbs the emergence of separate powers.

The alternative upheld by Bordiga: "Shall we take over the factory, or take over power?" (*Il Soviet*, February 20, 1920) can and must be superseded. We don't say: it does not matter who manages production, whether an executive or a council, because what counts is to have production without value. We say: as long as production for value continues, as long as it is

separated from the rest of life, as long as humankind does not collectively produce its ways and means of existence, as long as there is an "economy", any council is bound to lose its power to an executive. This is where we differ both from "councilists" and "Bordigists", and why we are likely to be called Bordigists by the former, and councilists by the latter.

Leaving The 20th Century?

The Spanish failure of 1936-37 is symmetrical to the Russian failure of 1917-21. The Russian workers were able to seize power, not to use it for a communist transformation. Backwardness, economic ruin and international isolation by themselves do not explain the involution. The perspective set out by Marx, and perhaps applicable in a different way after 1917, of a renaissance in a new form of communal agrarian structures, was at the time not even thinkable. Leaving aside Lenin's eulogy for Taylorism, and Trotsky's justification of military labour, for almost all the Bolsheviks and the overwhelming majority of the Third International, including the Communist Left, socialism meant a capitalist socialisation *plus* soviets, and the agriculture of the future was conceived as democratically managed large landholdings. (The difference — and it is a major one! — between the German-Dutch left and the Comintern was that the Left took soviets and worker democracy seriously, whereas the Russian communists, as their practice proved, saw in them nothing but tactical formulas.)

The Bolsheviks are the best illustration of what happens to a power which is only a power, and which has to hold on without changing real conditions very much.

What distinguishes reform from revolution is not that revolution is violent, but that it links insurrection and communisation. The Russian civil war was won in 1919, but sealed the fate of the revolution, as the victory over the Whites was achieved

Never Ask Theory for What It Can't Give

Revolution is not a problem, and no theory is the solution of that problem. (Two centuries of modern revolutionary movement demonstrate that communist theory does not anticipate the doings of the proletarians.)

History does not prove any direct causal link between a degree of capitalist development, and specific proletarian behaviour. It is improvable that at a given historical moment the essential contradiction of a whole system would bear upon the reproduction of its fundamental classes and therefore of the system itself. The error does not lie in the answer but in the question. Looking for what would *force* the proletarian, in his confrontation with capital, to attack his own existence as a wage-earner, is tantamount to trying to solve in advance and through theory a problem which can only be solved — if it ever is — in practice. We cannot exclude the possibility of a new project of social reorganisation similar to that which had workers' identity as its core. The rail-worker of 2002 can't live like his predecessor of 1950. This is not enough for us to conclude that he would only be left with the alternative of resignation or revolution.

When the proletariat seems absent from the scene, it is quite logical to wonder about its reality and its ability to change the world. Each counter-revolutionary period has the dual singularity of dragging along while never looking like the previous ones. That causes either a renunciation of critical activity, or the rejection of a revolutionary "subject", or its replacement by other solutions, or a theoretical elaboration supposed to account for past defeats *in order to* guarantee future success. This is asking for unobtainable certainties, which only serve to reassure. On the basis of historical experience, it seems more to the point to state that the proletariat remains the only subject of a revolution (otherwise there won't be any), that communist revolution is a possibility but not a

living beings, the succession of seasons and the gravitation of planets, and just like them scientifically predictable.

1789 might have happened forty years later or sooner, without a Robespierre and a Bonaparte, but a bourgeois revolution was bound to happen in France in the 18th or 19th century.

Who could argue that communism is bound to happen? The communist revolution is not the ultimate stage of capitalism.

> "With the psychology of a trade unionist who will not stay off his work on May Day unless he is assured in advance of a definite amount of support in the event of his being victimised, neither revolution nor mass strike can be made. But in the storm of the revolutionary period even the proletarian is transformed from a provident *pater familias* demanding support, into a 'revolutionary romanticist', for whom even the highest good, life itself, to say nothing of material well-being, possesses but little in comparison with the ideals of the struggle."[21]

Finally, whoever believes that 1848, 1917, 1968… were compelled to end up as they ended up, should be requested to prophesy the future — for once. No-one had foreseen May '68. Those who explain that its failure was inevitable only *knew* this afterwards. Determinism would gain credibility if it gave us useful forecasts.[22]

[21] Rosa Luxemburg *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions* (1906)

[22] The reader will understand that we're not preaching indeterminism. By and large, the 19th century was the epic of a conquering bourgeoisie with a faith in the iron logic of progress that left no alternative but final abundance and peace. 1914 opened an era of doubt and anti-determinism, as is evident in the popular appeal of the "uncertainty principle". There is no need for us to swap the scientific fashion of one age for another.

without communising society, and ended in a new state power. In his 1939 *Brown Fascism, Red Fascism*, Otto Rühle pointed out how the French Revolution had given birth to a military structure and strategy adequate to its social content. It unified the bourgeoisie with the people, while the Russian revolution failed to create an army based on proletarian principles. The Red Army that Poland defeated in 1920 hardly kept any revolutionary significance. As early as mid-1918, Trotsky summed it up in three words: "work, discipline, order".

Very logically and, at least in the beginning, in perfectly good faith, the soviet state perpetuated itself at any cost, first in the perspective of world revolution, then for itself, with the absolute priority being to preserve the unity of a society coming apart at the seams. This explains, on one hand, the concessions to small peasant property, followed by requisitions, both of which resulted in a further unravelling of any communal life or production. On the other hand, it also explains the repression against workers and against any opposition within the party.

In January 1921, the wheel had come full circle. The 1917 revolutionary wave set in motion by mutinies and basic democratic demands ended in the same way — except this time proles were being repressed by a "proletarian" state. A power which gets to the point of massacring the Kronstadt mutineers in the name of a socialism it could not realise, and which goes on to justify its action with lies and calumny, is only demonstrating that it no longer has any communist character. Lenin died his physical death in 1924, but the revolutionary Lenin had died as head of state in 1921, if not earlier. Bolshevism was left with no option but to become the manager of capitalism.

As the hypertrophy of a political perspective hell bent on eliminating the obstacles which it could not subvert, the October Revolution dissolved in a self-cannibalising civil war. Its

pathos was that of a power which, unable to transform society, degenerated into a counter-revolutionary force.

In the Spanish tragedy, the proletarians, because they had left their own terrain, wound up prisoners of a conflict in which the bourgeoisie and its state were present behind the front lines on both sides. In 1936-37, the proletarians of Spain were not fighting against Franco alone, but also against the fascist countries, against the democracies and the farce of "non-intervention", against their own state, against the Soviet Union, against…

The "Italian" and "German-Dutch" communist Left (including Mattick in the US) were among the very few who defined the post-1933 period as utterly anti-revolutionary, whereas many groups (Trotskyists, for example) were prompt to foresee subversive potentials in France, in Spain, in America, etc.

1937 closed the historical moment opened by 1917. From then on, capital would not accept any other community but its own, which meant there could no longer be permanent radical proletarian groups of any significant size. The demise of the POUM was tantamount to the end of the former workers' movement.

In a future revolutionary period, the most subtle and most dangerous defenders of capitalism will not be the people shouting pro-capitalist and pro-statist slogans, but those who have understood the possible point of a total rupture. Far from eulogising TV commercials and social submission, they will propose to change life… but, to that end, call for building a true democratic power first. If they succeed in dominating the situation, the creation of this new political form will use up people's energy, fritter away radical aspirations and, with the means becoming the end, will once again turn revolution into an ideology. Against them, and of course against overtly capitalist reaction, the proletarians' only path to success will be the multiplication of concrete communist initiatives, which will naturally

In other words, the revolutionary crisis is no longer perceived as a breaking up and superseding of the social conditions that create it. It is only conceived of as the conclusion of a pre-ordained evolution.

The methodological flaw is to believe in a privileged vantage point that enables the observer to grasp the totality (and the whole meaning) of past, present and near future human history.

In short, the causes of our previous shortcomings are not sought in the practical deeds of the proletarians. Instead of a labour-power overcoming its condition and rising to its historic task of freeing itself from its chains, and thus freeing humanity, the dynamic element is no longer proletarian action, but the movement of capital. The mutual involvement of capital and labour is reduced to a one-way relation of cause and effect. History gets frozen.

We would prefer to say that there is no other limit to the lifespan of capital than the conscious activity of the proletarians. Otherwise, no crisis, however deep it might be, will be enough to produce such a result. And any deep crisis (a crisis *of* the system, not just *in* it) could be the last if the proletarians took advantage of it. But there'll never be a day of reckoning, a final un-mediated showdown, as if at long last the proletarians were directly facing capital and therefore attacking it.

"The self-emancipation of the proletariat is the breakdown of capitalism", as Pannekoek wrote in the last sentence of his essay on *The Theory of the Breakdown of Capitalism* (1934). It is significant this should come as the conclusion of a discussion on capital's cycles and reproduction models (Marx's, Luxemburg's and Henrik Grossmann's). The communist movement cannot be understood through models similar to those of the reproduction of capital — unless we regard communism as the last logical (= as inevitable as any previous crisis) step in the course of capital. If this were the case, the communist revolution would be as "natural" as the growing up and ageing of

bourgeoisie, praised Lincoln, sided with quite a few reformist parties and unions while relentlessly targeting anarchists…[20] Shall we also have to agree with Lenin (because he acted like a new *revolutionary bourgeois*) against Gorter and Bordiga? And was Roosevelt a better (though unconscious) contributor to human emancipation than Rosa Luxemburg?

Anyway, from now on, all ambiguity is said to have been cleared up. We should be entering the final stage in the history of wage-labour: work is said to be now less and less available, more and more deskilled, devoid of any other meaning but to provide an income, thereby preventing the wage-earner from adhering to capital, and to the plan of a capitalism without capitalists. Reaching this threshold has made it impossible once and for all for labour to assert itself as labour within capital.

The underlying logic to this approach is to search for an unmediated class relationship that would leave no other solution for the proletariat but a direct (class against class) confrontation with capital.

Determinism revisits history to locate the obstacle to revolution, and discovers it in the form of the social space that the workers supposedly wished to occupy inside capitalism. Then that option is said to be now closed — such a social space does not exist any more because in fully real domination capitalism is everywhere. The reasons for past failures give the reasons for tomorrow's success, and provide the inevitability of communist revolution, as the obstacle is cleared away by the completion of what is described as capital's quasi natural life cycle.

[20] Any good biography of Marx describes his political activity, for instance Franz Mehring's and more recently Francis Wheen's. In his introduction to *Capital* volume I, Marx paid tribute to his time when he compared himself to a scientist who discovers "natural" laws. Fortunately, and in contradiction to Engels's funeral speech on his friend's grave, Marx was not the Darwin of the proletariat. Nor did he think history was foretold. To him, only a teleological mind would have the course of human history move to a pre-ordained end. There was no *single* line of evolution, as shown by the "late" Marx. See note 22 below.

often be denounced as anti-democratic or even as… "fascist". The struggle to establish places and moments for deliberation and decision, making possible the autonomy of the movement, will prove inseparable from practical measures aimed at changing life.

> "…in all past revolutions, the mode of activity has always remained intact and the only issue has been a different distribution of this activity and a redistribution of work among different persons; whereas the communist revolution is directed against the mode of activity as it has existed up till now and abolishes work and the domination of all classes by abolishing classes themselves, because it is carried out by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, which is not recognised as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc. within present society…"[21]

[21] Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology* (MECW 5), p. 52.

Normative History and the Communist Essence of the Proletariat

Théorie Communiste, 'Histoire normative et essence communiste du prolétariat. *Théorie Communiste*, no. 16, 2000
A critique of Gilles Dauvé's *When Insurrections Die*
Translated by *Endnotes*.

In *When Insurrections Die* we find the normative conception of the history of class struggle in its purity. On the first page Dauvé puts in place the vocabulary of this problematic: a vocabulary of "missed" chances and "failed" materialisations. Throughout the text fascism and Nazism are described as the result of the limits of the class struggles of the preceding period, but these limits are defined in relation to Communism (with a big 'C') rather than in relation to the struggles of that period. Meanwhile the history of capital is referred to a contradiction which overreaches it, a general contradiction of history: the separation between man and community, between human activity and society:

> "Democracy will never be able to solve the problem of the most separated society in history."[1]

[1] Gilles Dauvé, *When Insurrections Die,* p. 27 (all page references are to the text in the published copy of Endnotes #1, unless otherwise noted, a PDF of Endnotes #1 can be found here)

would be paradoxical that a severe crisis, instead of shaking it, should develop it even further.

Revolution is No Exact Science

The first part of this essay was mainly historical. What follows could be called methodological. Our critique of determinism focuses on a general tendency among revolutionaries to treat capitalist civilisation as if it were a one-way street to revolution.

From the omnipresence of capital, one can conclude with the possibility — or even necessity — of revolution. One could also deduct from it the impossibility of a revolution. That type of reasoning may be repeated indefinitely, and still be used in a hundred years if capitalism is still here. A theoretical model explains nothing but itself. Yesterday and tomorrow, as many reasons point to the continuity of capitalism as to its abolition. (As we wrote earlier, only when accomplished will the destruction of the old world throw a full light on past failures.)

Some comrades postulate the coming of an ultimate stage when the inner working of the system won't just upset it, but destroy it. They believe that whatever has happened before that final stage has been necessary, because up to now the workers have only been able to reform capitalism. Now there comes a threshold when reform becomes utterly pointless, a threshold that leaves no other option except revolution. Past radical proletarian activity has only contributed to bring about the historical moment that makes revolution possible — or necessary, rather. Until then, the class struggle has provided the required sequence of phases preparing the final phase.

By the way, this would justify what has been called Marx's and Engels' *revolutionary reformism* — urging the bourgeoisie to develop capitalism and create the conditions of communism. Among other things, Marx supported the German national

he would submit to the common prejudice that debases the competence of a simple order-taker.

On the other hand, non-adherence to work is not enough to guarantee the possibility of revolution, let alone its success. A proletarian who regards himself as nothing will never question anything. The unskilled worker of 1970 was convinced he was doing a stupid job, not that he was stupid himself: his critique addressed precisely the emptiness of an activity unworthy of what he claimed to be. A purely negative vision of the world and of oneself is synonymous with resignation or acceptance of anything. The proletarian only starts acting as a revolutionary when he goes beyond the negative of his condition and begins to create something positive out of it, i.e. something that subverts the existing order. It's not for lack of a critique of work that the proletarians have not *made the revolution*, but because they stayed within a negative critique of work.

The affirmation of labour has not been the principal factor of counter-revolution, only (and this is important!) one of its main expressions. But unions conveyed this ideology through what remains their *essential* function: the bargaining of labour power. Organisations like the Knights of Labour at the end of the 19th century played a minor part, and withered with the generalisation of large scale industry.

If the promotion of labour was as central as we're sometimes told, Fordism would have taken it up. But Scientific Management did not defeat the skilled workers by bestowing more professional dignity on the shop-floor, but by deskilling and breaking down trades. Generous schemes for job enrichment and re-empowerment are only implemented to disrupt the autonomy of the work team — then these reforms gradually fade away because the rank and file does not really care.

The ideas that rule are those of the ruling class. The ideology of work, whatever form it takes, is the capitalist ideology of work. There can't be any other. When the social consensus is shattered, that representation goes down with the others. It

But this was never its intention. Only the society in which the relations between people are the strongest and most developed produces the fiction of the isolated individual. The question is never to know how individuals, determined by a mode of production, are linked together by a political form, but why these social bonds take the form of politics. A certain type of individual corresponds to a certain type of community; individuals form communities as limited as themselves. Democracy (the state in general) is the form of this community at the political level; it does not respond to a general separation — such a separation does not exist. To say that democracy responds "badly" to separation is to say that this general separation is the general dynamic of history (an idea broadly developed in *La Banquise*).

We are told that the workers were defeated by democracy (with the aid of the parties and unions); but the objectives — the content — of these workers' struggles (in Italy, Spain, Germany) always remains unspoken. We are thus plunged into the problematic of "betrayal" by the parties and unions.[2] That the workers obeyed reformist movements — *it is precisely this that ought to have been explained* — and on the basis of the nature of those struggles themselves, rather than letting the nebulous shadows of manipulation and trickery pass for explanation. "Proletarians trusted the democrats"[3], the very same proletariat which fought capital "using its own methods and goals"[4]; methods and goals which are never defined. Dauvé goes so far as to ask the question, "Who defeated this proletarian energy?"[5] but nothing is ever said of the content, the forms and the limits proper to this energy. It is proletarian energy and that is all. For Dauvé the central question was "how

[2] p. 29
[3] p. 31
[4] p. 28
[5] p. 32

to control the working class?"[6] but before asking this question we need to ask another one: "What does the working class do?" This always seems self-evident in the text, just a matter of "proletarian energy". Why then did the "control" succeed in '21 and in '43 (in Italy)? These are the questions to which the text only responds anecdotally; or else in the profound manner we'll see later on: the workers failed and were beaten because they didn't make the revolution — a collapse into tautology.

We find this same indeterminate "revolutionary energy" in the analysis of the working class defeat and subsequent victory of Nazism in Germany:

> "The German defeat of 1918 and the fall of the empire set in motion a proletarian assault [we must be dealing with a manifestation of 'proletarian energy'] strong enough to shake the foundations of society, but impotent to revolutionize it, thus bringing Social Democracy and the unions to centre stage as the key to political equilibrium".[48]

We are not told anything else about this "proletarian assault". Why is it not powerful enough to revolutionise society? That's the question, however, and the only one we need answer. Things seem so obvious to the author, it's enough to say "proletariat" and "revolution". At one moment he fleetingly gives us an indication: the German radical movement is described as "aspiring to a *workers' world*".[7] But this comment of fundamental import isn't developed; here it serves only as a sort of detail which does not resolve the question of defeat, and it is immediately downplayed by the generality of the "proletarian assault".

[6] p. 34
[7] p. 36. Our emphasis

of a commodity that contains the possibility of all others, and can transform everything, while having to sell this commodity, and therefore to *act* and *picture himself* as a valorizer. The potential gravedigger of the system is the same one who feeds it.

Only with commodity exchange do relationships between humans appear as relations between things. The 19th century worker tended to see in capital only the capitalist. The 21st century wage-earner often perceives capital as just… capital, and not his own activity that (re)produces it. Fetishism still rules, albeit depersonalised, but it still veils the social relations producing capital. The denunciation of exploitation usually misses what economy is — the domination of everything and everyone by production for value. Actually, what's at stake from a communist point of view is not what capital hides and what most proletarians have the intuition of: the extraction of surplus-value. What's at stake is what capitalism imposes daily in real life and impresses on our minds: the economy as something obvious and inevitable, the necessity of exchanging commodities, of buying and selling labour, if we wish to avoid want, misery and dictatorship.

True, contemporary work does not socialise well because it tends to become a pure means of earning a living. Still, that socialisation does not vanish. (The emergence of radical reformism has to do with its persistence.) As a Moulinex laid-off worker said in 2001: "The hardest thing now is to be alone." The ideology of labour power is the necessary ideology of the proletarian within capital. That commodity is the prime reality of billions of men and women. The proletarian is never reduced to what capital turns him into, yet he feels a need to be recognised and socially enhanced, and that need is based on his only asset: work. He has to have this positive image of himself, if only to be able to sell himself on good terms. In an interview, the job seeker will not devalue himself. If he did,

gave them. Only peasant communities, in so much as they stood outside the world economy, could go on living on their own for a long while. Modern workers have been unable to set up any reorganised social life that would rival normal or purely *capitalist* capitalism for a durable length of time. No room for a Third Way any more.

The Contradiction May Not Be Where We Think

Every reader of Marx knows that he never completed what he regarded as his master work, and that he rewrote the beginning several times. Why does Marx linger on the commodity, why does he start with the way capitalism *presents itself*, instead of giving its definition right away? If he insists first on representation and not on capital's nature, it may well be that he thinks its nature is related to its representation, which is no psychological process, but has to do with social representation at its deepest.

The author of *Das Kapital* keeps talking about a mystery, a secret to penetrate. Which one? It is hard to believe Marx is only concerned with proving to the worker that he is exploited… It's more logical Marx would be circling the various facets of capital to focus on a contradiction more crucial to the communist movement than the mechanics of surplus-value.[19] He is targeting the amazing dynamics of a social system that is based more than any other on those it enslaves and provides them with weapons to dismantle it, but — because of that — manages to integrate them into its triumphant and destructive march, and (at least until now) uses social crises to regenerate itself. The contradiction of the proletarian is to be the bearer

[19] At the time, various people had the intuition of the origin of surplus-value, and some came close to formulating it, for example Flora Tristan in 1843.

The key to the problematic is given to us in an incidental remark:

> "But the conservative revolution also took over old anti-capitalist tendencies (the return to nature, the flight to cities…) that the workers' parties, even the extremist ones, had misestimated by their refusal to integrate the a-classist and communitarian dimension of the proletariat, and their inability to think of the future as anything but an extension of heavy industry."[8]

We'll leave aside the struggles of the Nazi regime against heavy industry; it's the "proletarian energy" which interests us. This energy resides in this "a-classist and communitarian dimension". If this is so, once this dimension is proclaimed, everything else — that is the real history of class struggles — can be nothing more than a succession of forms more or less adequate to it. The general pattern of the argument is then as follows: man and society are separate and this is the foundation of all history; all the historic forms of human society are built on this separation and try to resolve them but only through alienated forms. Capital is the society in which the contradiction is pushed to its limits, but simultaneously (Hegel to the rescue!) it is the society which gives birth to a class with this communal dimension, an a-classist class. As for capital, it is forced to respond to the same question of separation (which, let's not forget, is just a form of social bond), with the state, democracy, politics. We have arrived at the simple opposition of two answers to the same question. It is no longer proletariat and capital which are the terms of the contradiction within the capitalist mode of production, but the human community carried by the proletariat and politics (the state) which confront each other, the only connection between them being that they

[8] p. 36

are opposing solutions to the trans-historical problem of the separation of man and society, individual and community. We can find this problematic in developed form in *La Banquise*'s 'The Story of Our Origins' (*LB* no. 2). This whole problematic ignores the basic axiom of materialism: that a certain type of individual corresponds to a certain type of community.

The proletariat does not have an a-classist or communitarian dimension: it has, in its contradiction with capital, the ability to abolish capital and class society and to produce community (the social immediacy of the individual). This is not a dimension that it carries within itself — neither as a nature that comes to it from its situation in the capitalist mode of production, nor as the finally discovered subject of the general tendency of history towards community.

Unable, in such a problematic, to consider class struggle as the real history of its immediate forms and to understand that its particular historical content exhausts the totality of what transpires in the struggle (and not as a historical form of something else), Dauvé never tells us why the revolution failed, or why it is that every time the state, the parties, the unions want to destroy the revolutionary movement, *it works*. "Counter-revolution inevitably triumphs on the terrain of revolution"[9] — exactly, but we never find out why the counter-revolution wins out in relation to the historical characteristics of the revolution. The author describes how it happens, but leaves it at that. Given the general problematic, the only explanation has to be tautological: the revolution failed because it didn't go further. In saying this we've said nothing on the actually existing failure of the actually existing revolution. "In this juncture, democracy and Social Democracy were indispensable to German capitalism for killing off the spirit of revolt in the polling booth, winning a series of reforms from the bosses, and

[9] p. 36

Capitalism is the first universal exploitation system. Surplus-labour is no longer extorted from someone who organises and therefore controls his production to a large extent, as was the case of the peasant under Asiatic despotism, the serf pressurized by his lord and by the taxman, or the craftsman dominated by the merchant. These weren't exploited *within* their work: part of the fruit of their labour was taken away from them from *outside* and after it had been produced. Buying and selling labour power introduces exploitation, not on the edge of human activity, but in its heart.

But, because of that very process — because the wage-earner sells his labour power — he makes capital as much as he is made by it, he lives *inside* capital to a far higher degree than the peasant depended on his master and the craftsman on the merchant. Because he lives (and resists, and fights) inside capital, he produces and shares its essentials, including consumption and democracy. Because selling his life force is necessary to him, he can only despise and reject his work, in reality and in his mind, by rejecting what makes him exist as a wage-earner, i.e. by rejecting capital. In other words, if it's got to be more than everyday resistance, refusal of work is only possible through an acute social crisis.

In pre-industrial times, the Peasants' wars in the 15th and 16th centuries, the Tai-Ping in 19th century China, and many others, managed to build up self-sufficient liberated areas that sometimes survived for over ten years. In the West Indies, Black slaves could take to the hills and live on their own outside "civilisation". The industrial world leaves no such space for an alternative. If the 1919 Petrograd worker fled to the countryside, capitalism caught up with him within a few years. The Spanish collectivities of 1936–38 never "liberated" large areas. More recently, Bolivian miners self-managed their villages, with armed militia, radio stations, co-ops, etc. But it stopped when the mines were closed down. Their social dynamism depended on the function that international capital

that of housewives). It gets irrelevant when it regards value as the result of a uniform totality. Managers know their Marx better than Toni Negri — they keep tracing and measuring productive places and moments to try and rationalise them more and more. They even locate and develop "profit centres" within the company. Work is not diffuse, it is separated from the rest. If manual labour is evidently not the unique or main source of value, if *immaterial* labour is on the increase, work remains vital to our societies. It is strange to speak of an "end of work" when temp agencies are among the largest employers in the *US*.

In a country like France, though sociologists and statisticians tell us that there are more office than factory workers (now reduced to ¼ of the working population), the latter — 80% of whom are male — are often married to the former. As a consequence, 40% of kids are living in a household where one of their parents is a "blue collar" worker, often employed in the service sector. Instead of walking through factory gates every morning, he is in charge of maintenance, drives a heavy vehicle, moves goods in a warehouse, etc. Half of French workers aren't "industrial" any more. Still, thus defined, workers are the most numerous groups. Whether they're old style factory operatives, service sector manual wage-earners, Taylorised clerks, cashiers, etc., underling wage-earners compose over half of the French working population. (It would be interesting to have the exact figures for a would-be *city of the future* like Los Angeles.) These facts do not change anything in the validity or vanity of a communist perspective, their only merit is precisely to show that nothing fundamental has changed since the 19th century. According to Marx's own figures in *Capital* volume I, there were more servants than industrial workers in mid-Victorian England. Should the theory of the proletariat be wrong, it was already so in 1867, and it isn't wrong in 2002 because there aren't enough workers left.

dispersing the revolutionaries."[10] But the relation of this activity of the capitalist class and social democracy to the historical content of the revolution itself, which alone would tell us why "it works", has not been explained; herein lies the necessary blind spot of this problematic.

The chapter on Spain takes the impasses of this problematic to an extreme. Dauvé describes precisely the counter-revolution (we have no disagreement on this), but he only talks about the revolution on the basis of what it didn't do, in relation to what it should have done and as a succession of "fatal errors":

> "After defeating the forces of reaction in a large number of cities, the workers had the power. But what were they going to do with it? Should they give it back to the republican state, or should they use it to go further in a communist direction?"[11]

We know the answer, and Dauvé explains to us in great detail the "fatal error" of the Spanish revolutionaries who failed to take on the legal government, the State. But why did they make this error, was this error not bound up with the very nature of the "proletarian assault"? (It was certainly fatal, but whether we can talk of an error is less sure). These are the real questions which this problematic cannot address. "In May ´37, workers still had the capacity to rise up against the state (this time in its democratic form), but they could no longer push their struggle to the point of an open break"[12]— so this capacity did exist in July 1936. For Dauvé the masses are "deceived" by the *CNT* and the *POUM* who are afraid of alienating the State:

[10] p. 38. Translator's note (*TN*): In the French version of the text to which *Théorie Communiste* refer, democracy and Social Democracy were also indispensable for containing/integrating (*encadrer*) workers. This phrase is omitted from the English version.

[11] p. 34

[12] p. 50

> "Because they accepted the mediation of 'representative organisations' and counsels of moderation from the *POUM* and the *CNT*, the very same masses who had defeated the fascist military in July 1936 surrendered without a fight to the Republican police in May 1937."[13]

If we follow this interpretation, Spanish proletarians are idiots. It is extraordinary to write such expressions as: "the masses placed their trust", "fatal error", "the proletarians, convinced that they had effective power", "because they accepted the mediation…," without a single moment of doubt, or a question such as: but why does it work? Why did they give their trust? Why did this error happen? Why this conviction? If these questions don't even momentarily occur, we should nonetheless ask ourselves why not.

The point is that in the text the proletariat is by nature revolutionary, and, even better, communist. It is a given that history is the history of the separation of man and society; as for proletarians, they are "commodified beings who no longer can and no longer want to exist as commodities, and whose revolt explodes capitalist logic". Proletarians are, in themselves, contradictory beings, and as such they carry the community — communism — within themselves. It follows that when they fail to make the revolution, it's that they are wrong, or have been deceived. Thus it is that which failed to happen which becomes the explanation for what actually happened.

The formula "commodified beings, etc." leaves shrouded in darkness theoretical questions which could not be more arduous or decisive. The proletarians are here the crux of an internal contradiction, one of whose terms is left unsaid and is taken as given: on the one hand they are commodities, but in the name of what, on the other, do they no longer want to be this? Elementary: they are men. The social definition of the proletariat

[13] p. 51

managerial practices that leave bourgeois power intact, and which this power sooner or later will sweep away.

The ideal of a wage-labour capitalism, and the attempt to realise it, are not remains from the past that a real domination of capital (or some form of it *more* real than previously) would at last be able to undermine.[17] The adhesion to work is neither (as Situationists tend to think) a delusion which the proles should or now can grow out of, nor (as *Théorie Communiste* tends to think) a historical phase formerly inevitable but now gone. It is neither an ideology nor a stage in history (though both aspects play their part). Wage-labour is not a phenomenon imposed from outside, but the social relationship that structures our society: practical and collective adherence to work is built into the framework of that relationship.

What's New About Capitalism

Some have interpreted contemporary capitalism as a production of value without work, of a value so diffused that its productive agents and moments would be scattered throughout the whole social fabric.

Neither theory (Marx's *Grundrisse*, in particular[18]) nor hard facts validate this thesis. It's true that today valorisation depends much less on the direct intervention of every single producer than on a collective effort. It is a lot more difficult to isolate each productive wage-earner's contribution to value than in 1867. Nevertheless, it is not an undifferentiated social whole that valorises capital. The assembler, the lorry-driver, the computer expert, the firm researcher… do not add value to the company to the same extent. The "social factory" theory is relevant as far as it takes into account unpaid productive labour (e.g.,

[17] On formal and real domination see: Marx, *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* (*MECW 34*), pp. 355, 471.

[18] Also the beginning of *Capital* vol. 1, chap.16 (*MECW* 35), p. 509ff.

partially express them – the anthropological dimension of work has been sufficiently exposed elsewhere that we don't have to go into it here.[16]

In periods of social turmoil, either the workers show a deep indifference to work (sometimes running away from it); or work is re-imposed on them. During such periods, proletarians initiate a critique of their condition, because refusing work is a first move toward negating oneself as a proletarian.

It's true, however, that so far they have not gone past that critique, or its early steps. There lies the problem.

It's not the critique of work that's been lacking, like an essential dimension up to now neglected. How many men and women are happy to wear themselves out for the sake of churning out alarm clocks or pencils, or of processing files for the *NHS*? The worker is well aware that work stands as his enemy and, as far as he can, he does his best to get away from it. What is more difficult for him to imagine (and even more to put into deeds) is that he could do away with both work *and* capital. Isn't it the critique of capital that's been lacking, and still is? People are prone to lay the blame on the reign of money, and they also denounce the alienation of work: what is much less common is the understanding of the unity that binds the two, the critique of selling one's activity in exchange for an income, i.e. the critique of wage-labour, of capital.

The failure of the proletarian movement up to now is to be related to its own activity, not to its specific formatting by capital at specific historical moments. Formatting provides the conditions: it does not give nor ever will give the means to use them. And we'll only have a true answer once the transformation of the world is achieved.

In any case, a revolutionary period weakens (rather than strengthens) the ideology of emancipating labour through labour. Then the ebb of the radical wave brings about self-

[16] La Banquise 'Sous le travail: l'activité' (*La Banquise* no. 4, 1986)

in a specific mode of production gives way to a hybrid definition: commodity and man. But who then is this man who is not the ensemble of his social relations through which he is merely a commodity?

From the moment that the revolutionary nature of the proletariat is constructed as this contradictory hybridisation of man and commodity, the history of the class struggle — and more precisely of revolution and communism — disappears. Communism is inscribed once and for all in the nature of the proletariat. That the proletariat can't and doesn't want to remain what it is, is not a contradiction internal to its nature, intrinsic to its being, but rather the actuality of its contradictory relation to capital in a historically specific mode of production. It is the relation to capital of that particular commodity which is labour power, as a relation of exploitation, which is the revolutionary relation. Posed in this way, it is necessarily a history: that of this contradiction. The class struggle in Barcelona in May '37 was not the movement of communism in general (even in these particular conditions) which fell short for reasons which can never be given; it was rather the revolution as it really existed, that is to say, as affirmation of the proletariat drawing its force and the content of its autonomy from its very condition inside the capitalist mode of production. "Errors" now appear as what they are, inherent limits, to the extent that the revolution implies its own counter-revolution. *The affirmation of the autonomy of the proletariat implies the affirmation of what it is in capital; that is where it finds its power and the* raison d´être *for its action, at the same time as the essential link between this action and the counter-revolution is produced.*

The affirmation of an "a-classist", "communitarian" dimension of the proletariat merely derives from a poor understanding of an era of the class struggle (up to the 1840s) and not from the revolutionary nature of the proletariat. However, this allows the proletariat to be constructed as figure of humanity, as representation of a pre-existing contradiction. Communism

is presupposed as tension, as tendency, which opposes itself to capital from the outset of the capitalist mode of production and aims to explode it. This is different from affirming that communism is the movement which abolishes existing conditions, that is to say the movement of the *internal* contradiction of these conditions. Moreover, if the proletariat is invested with this dimension, the historical process of the class struggle is no longer really necessary in relation to the revolution: it is merely a process of *realisation*. This causes the slippage in the analysis whereby the contradiction between communism and capital comes to replace the contradiction between the proletariat and capital.

If we come back to the course of the Spanish civil war as described in the text, what is striking is the use of the subjunctive and the conditional: "Taking the revolution beyond areas under republican control, however, would have meant completing the revolution in the republican areas as well".[14] What failed to happen is always the explanation for what actually happened: "but even Durruti did not seem to realize that the state was everywhere still intact." Everything happens as if there were a huge thermometer with a scale up to Communist Revolution (human community): you stick it into a sensitive point of events and see how far the mercury rises, then you explain that the mercury only rose that far because it failed to rise any further.

However "Durruti and his comrades embodied an energy which had not waited for 1936 to storm the existing world".[15] "Proletarian energy" plays a starring role in this vision of history: it is what makes the mercury rise in the thermometer. It is, like in the old physics, one of those ineffable forces destined to wrap up all tautologies. We note in passing that "energy" is

[14] p. 53
[15] p. 55

afterwards interpret that process as the cause of the cult, is tantamount to analysing something from its contrary. Marx and Stalin both talked of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but Stalin does not explain Marx. To say that the *KPD* programme in 1930 (or the *SPD* programme in 1945) would reveal the true nature of the *KAPD* programme in 1920, is to turn history upside down.

Once the counter-revolution was there to stay, work (in the *US* as in the *USSR*) could only exist under constraint: the workers weren't put to work as a pseudo ruling class, but as a really ruled one, and according to proven capitalist methods. The ideology of workers' management was flatly denied by unions and labour parties of all kinds. Now they had a share in power (in corporate boardrooms as in ministries) they could only promote the economy by resorting to the good old devices that had been beneficial to the bourgeois for centuries.

In the most acute social crises, whatever they may have thought or said, the proletarians did not try to assert themselves through asserting the value of work. Since the origins of the class struggle, they have kept fighting for less working hours and more pay. Let's also bear in mind the stuff daily workshop or office life is made of: absenteeism, petty thefts, go-slows, non-genuine illness or faked injuries, even sabotage or assault on supervisors, all of which only decrease in times of severe unemployment. If *freebie* strikes (for instance, when transportation workers permit free rides, or postal employees allow free postage and phone calls) are so rare, it's a sign that strikes offer a pleasant opportunity to dodge work.

We're not suggesting that proletarian reality is a permanent underground rebellion. The contradictory role of the wage-earner in the productive process entails a contradictory attitude to work. The proletarian puts a lot into work, among other reasons because no-one can stand a job for hours and years without a minimum of interest, and because work both stultifies our ability and know-how *and* allows us to at least

In that matter at least, there's no coincidence between political platforms and proletarian practices. Workers' movements don't boil down to an affirmation of labour. The attempts to resume production were often enough a makeshift solution, an effort to fill a gap caused by the absence or incompetence of the boss. In that case, occupying the premises and restarting the work process did not mean an affirmation of the workers as workers — as in other circumstances when a bankrupt company is bought out of by its personnel, it was a means of survival. When, in Argentina at the end of 2001, the workers took over the Bruckman textile factory which was threatened with closure, and kept it going, they did so with no prospect of transforming capitalism into socialism, even within the limits of a single firm. This then became the case with dozens of Argentinian companies. Such behaviour occurs when proletarians think they have no chance of changing the world.

An essential point here is how far we are determined by history. If the "being" of the proletariat theorised by Marx is not just a metaphysics, its content is independent of the forms taken by capitalist domination. The tension between the submission to work and the critique of work has been active since the dawn of capitalism. Of course the realisation of communism depends on the historical moment, but its deep content remains invariant in 1796 and in 2002. Otherwise, we would not understand how, as early as the 1840's, some people were able to define communism as the abolition of wage-labour, classes, the State *and work*. If everything is determined by a historical necessity that was logically immature in 1845, how could we explain the genesis of communist theory at that time?

In the 20th century it was *the failure* of the rich post-1917 revolutionary process that gave full scope to the social-democratic and Stalinist cult of the productive forces.[15] To

[15] On how both Stalinism and Nazism glorified work and social egalitarianism, see *Communism*, ICG, no. 13, 2002, 'On the Praise of Work'.

embodied, just like "momentum".[16] Ultimately, without explaining why the Spanish revolution fails to go further and what its essential relation to the counter-revolution is, Dauvé accumulates all the perfectly pertinent "hows", but without ever providing us with the beginnings of an explanation; unless it is in the conditional, with the condition being what should have been done:

> "the announcement of immediate and unconditional independence for Spanish Morocco would, at minimum, have stirred up trouble among the shock troops of reaction."[17]
>
> "In order to be consolidated and extended, the transformations without which revolution becomes an empty word had to pose themselves as antagonistic to a state clearly designed as the adversary. The trouble was, after July 1936, dual power existed in appearance only. Not only did the instruments of proletarian power which emerged from the insurrection, and those which subsequently oversaw the socialisations, tolerate the state, but they accorded the state a primacy in the anti-Franco struggle, as if it were tactically necessary to pass through the state in order to defeat Franco."[18]
>
> "Communist measures could have undermined the social bases of the two states (republican and nationalist), if only by solving the agrarian

[16] *TN*: "*élan*" — a play on Dauvé's "revolutionary élan" (pp. 57, 67) which in other texts by Dauvé is translated as "revolutionary wave" "…surge" or "…momentum". Here it corresponds to one of the ineffable forces of a defunct physics.

[17] p. 56

[18] p. 59

> question: in the 1930's, more than half of the population went hungry. A subversive force erupted, bringing to the fore the most oppressed strata, those farthest from 'political life' (e.g. women), but it could not go all the way and eradicate the system root and branch."[19]

Why? To answer that question the revolution must be defined other than as "revolutionary élan", "communist potential" or "aborted revolution".[20] The contradiction between the proletariat and capital must be considered as a relation of reciprocal implication, and revolution and communism as historical products — not as the result of the nature of the revolutionary class defined as such once and for all.

For Dauvé the German revolution, like the Russian and Spanish ones, testifies to "a communist movement remaking all of society".[21] But it is precisely the nature of this communist movement, at this particular juncture in the history of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, that must be defined if we want to understand its limits and its relation to the counter-revolution without reducing it to what it should have done and what it wasn't. Nevertheless the author furnishes us with an explanation of the limits of the revolution, albeit without seeming to attribute much importance to it:

> "The Spanish Civil War proved both the revolutionary vigour of communitarian bonds and forms which have been penetrated by capital but which are not yet daily reproduced by capital, and also their impotence, taken by themselves, in bringing off a revolution. The absence of an assault against the state condemned the establishment of different

[19] p. 68
[20] pp. 57, 66, 59 respectively
[21] p. 67

These occupations were usually in response to (real or fraudulent) bankruptcy, or to a closure of the plant by the owner. Sometimes, they got rid of a boss who had been too visibly supporting the Salazar regime. One of the objectives was to counter economic sabotage by the opponents of the Revolution of the Carnations. It was also a means to impose specific demands such as the reintegration of fired militant workers, to apply government decisions regarding wages and work conditions, or to prevent planned redundancies.

This social surge (*élan*) never questioned the circulation of money, nor the existence and function of the State. Self-managers would turn to the State for capital, and more often than not Stalinist — influenced agencies would logically reserve investment funds for their political friends or allies. They also asked the State to impose exchanges between self-managed firms and those that weren't. Wages were still being paid, often with a narrowed wage differential, or none. Hierarchy was frequently dismantled, and the rank and file had a democratic say in most decisions. Still, the movement did not go beyond workers' control over production, wage scales, and hiring and firing. It was a kind of *LIP* extended to an entire relatively poor capitalist country. The Portuguese experience was a replay of all the dead-ends revived by the 60s-70s era: populism, syndicalism, Leninism, Stalinism, self-management…

Critique of Work / Critique of Capital

Short as it is, our historical scan casts the shadow of doubt on the thesis that the (undeniable) self-identification of the proletarian as producer has been the decisive cause of our defeats. When did the workers really try to shoulder economic growth? When did they compete with old time bourgeois owners or modern directors for the management of the companies?

which remained on the fringe of the movement: in 1973, *LIP*, a watchmaker company that went bankrupt, was taken over by the personnel and became a symbol of self-managed capitalism. But its principles ("We produce, we sell, we pay ourselves") were little more than an ingenious yet desperate attempt to avoid unemployment and to continue to get an income. *LIP*'s wage-earners self-managed distribution more than production (they sold a lot of watches and manufactured few), until they had to close down. In the mid-1970s, radicals were perfectly justified to analyse the *LIP* adventure as an experiment in self-exploitation, but quite wrong to interpret it as a feasible form of counter-revolution. Clearly, this was neither a viable option for the capitalists, nor a popular one among workers.

Similar attempts with a partial restarting of manufacturing and some selling of stock were to follow, particularly in the engineering industry, However, these were more a way to react to a programmed closure, than a blueprint for the future. Whatever theories may have been elaborated by leftists, these self-management embryos were grounded on nothing solid, nothing able to mobilise the workers. Such practices appeared at the crossroads of an endemic critique of work that led to nothing else, and the beginning of a capitalist restructuring about to dispose of excess labour.

Portugal: 1974[14]

The "Revolution of the Carnations" set in motion factory sit-ins and self-management practices. These occurred generally in small or medium size firms, mostly in *poor* industries, employing simple technology and unskilled labour such as textiles, furniture-making and agro-industry.

[14] Phil Mailer, *Portugal: The Impossible Revolution* (Solidarity, 1977). A lively account and thorough analysis.

> relationships to a fragmentary self-management preserving the content and often the forms of capitalism, notably money and the division of activities by individual enterprises."[22]

And what if it was precisely these bonds and these forms which prevented the "assault"? And what if this were just a particular form of the affirmation of the proletariat? Dauvé does not ask himself this type of question, because for him the particular conditions are always merely the conditions in relation to what the revolution must do, and not the very form of the revolution at a given moment. In this brief but very interesting passage he does not escape a problematic of objective conditions / revolutionary nature. These particular conditions which he calls to our attention should have been those which nonetheless should have produced an assault against the state. In consequence this explanation of the limits is given but doesn't intervene in the general reasoning. If it had intervened, Dauvé would have been forced to historically specify the "revolutionary vigour", the "revolutionary élan", and could no longer have spoken of "aborted revolution" or "communist potentialities". He would no longer have been able to explain what had happened by what hadn't, and all the "would-have-beens" would have had no sense. As it is he is content to juxtapose an ahistorical vision of the revolution and of communism with the conditions which will give it form, which will model it. The history of class struggle is here always double: on the one hand the communist principle, the élan or revolutionary energy which animates the proletariat, a transcendent history, and on the other, the limited manifestation of this energy, an anecdotal history. Between these two aspects there exists a hierarchy. Transcendent history is "real" history, and real history with all its limits is only the accidental form of the former, so much so that the former is constantly the judgment of the latter.

[22] p. 67

One can hardly question Dauvé's remark on the condition of social relations in 1930's Spain, but either it was possible to do what he says it would have been necessary to do, and thus the conditions could have been overcome, or it was not possible and in that case the conditionals of Dauvé lose all rational signification. Such a situation would have been overcome if the revolutionary élan was that which he *presupposes* in his analysis. But if it was a matter of a programmatic struggle, such a situation (communal bonds) is a material that it reworks according to its own nature.

One could consider that the whole of this historical text is a work of reflection on what the revolution must and can be today. But the problem with Dauvé is that he presents this in an eternal, atemporal, fashion; so much so that if we finish more knowledgeable we have nonetheless made no advance on the essential question: question: why could the revolution be today what it wasn't in the past?

We should make it clear: we are absolutely in agreement with the sequence of facts that Dauvé presents, as much for Germany as for Spain (with some reservations in regard to Russia). His conception of the communist revolution is entirely our own as far as its content and communist measures are concerned, its comprehension as communisation and not as prior to this communisation. Where we differ profoundly is on the comprehension of the course of class struggle as the juxtaposition of a given, known, communist principle within the being of the proletariat, and a history which contents itself with expressing this principle in a partial, confused or aborted fashion. Its not a question of the method of historical analysis; this isn't a quarrel between philosophers of history. As always, what is at stake is the comprehension of the current period. Dauvé's method renders impossible the comprehension of the overcoming of programmatism, of the revolution as af-

France and Elsewhere: 1968

This time, the festive element that characterised the June 36 sit-downs was fairly absent in France, but quite widespread in Italy. In many French factories dominated by the *CGT*, the place was practically locked up, for fear restless workers and "outsiders" would upset the orderly running of the strike by the union. '68 was in many respects harsher than '36, as a small but determined proletarian minority challenged the hegemony of the Stalinists over the industrial workers.

The festive dimension moved from the factory to the street, which indicated that demands were breaking the workplace barrier and that the heart of the matter was encompassing the whole of daily life. In France, the most radical wage-earners would often leave the factory. There was no Chinese Wall between "workers" and "students" (a lot of whom were not students at all). Many workers, often young ones, would share their time between their work mates inside the factory, and discussion (and sometimes action) groups outside, where they met with minority workers from other factories.[13] Moreover, during the Italian Hot Autumn of 69, it was quite common for workers to occupy the premises in the daytime, leave at night and be back the following morning, even after they'd been violently fighting the police and company guards to occupy the plant. They felt that the essential was not happening just within the confines of the workplace. As passive reaction (absenteeism) turned active (collective sabotage, permanent meeting and wild partying on the assembly line, etc.), it burst outside the factory walls.

The aftermath of '68 brought forth an experience that set itself up (and that many people accepted) as exemplary, but

[13] Richard Grégoire & Freddy Perlman, *Worker-Student Action Committees* (Black & Red, 1969). Also Francois Martin, 'The Class Struggle and Its Most Characteristics Aspects in Recent Years…' in *Eclipse and Re-Emergence…* (Antagonism Press, 1998).

party had to resort to much persuasion because people took a nap in the afternoon. According to a Mirafiori shop steward, the union activists were labelled "fascists" when they tried to convince the workers that it was their duty as comrades to work: "they interpreted freedom as the right to do nothing". The workers would come in at 8.30 in the morning and have breakfast. An ex-partisan then employed at Mirafiori sadly told how the workers misused their own freedom, how they loitered in the toilets. They weren't suitable material for building socialism, he regretted, they went on strike to play games — "we were more serious". The personnel kept resisting anything that came close to a control over time, to the reintroduction of material incentives. On factory walls, writings like "Down with timing" were a rejection of the pro-Taylor quotes by Lenin which the Stalinists were most fond of.

If the *CMC*s eventually proved relatively efficient in restoring discipline and hierarchy, they failed to raise productivity: in 1946, it only increased by 10%, which wasn't much, owing to its low level at the end of the war. Above all, they failed to create a "new" proletarian — the one that would manage his own exploitation. The *CMC*s composed only of workers never got off the ground. The proles had more trust in their direct delegates, the shop-floor commissars, who were more inclined to go on strike than to produce.

This multiform unrest went on until 1948, which was the last outburst against a worsening repression and deteriorating living conditions. A partial wage freeze was imposed in April 1947, and maintained until 1954. For about 15 years, the Fiat workers underwent unrestrained exploitation and were nearly deprived of union protection. In other words, in 1944–47, the Italian proletarians were not defeated because they had tried to establish a domination of labour over capital while remaining within capital. They got crushed by the bourgeoisie in a more conventional way — with the help of union and party bureaucracies.

firmation of the proletariat.[23] The communist revolution as we can *currently* conceive it, as it presents itself in this cycle of struggle, is for him already there (limited, aborted, with errors and illusions, etc.) in the Russian, German and Spanish revolutions. Thus even when we say that we are in agreement with the conception of the revolution that he presents at the end of his brochure, this is because he does not see that *this* revolution is not — is no longer — that of Russia etc. They were revolutions of the cycle of struggle in which the proletariat was affirmed; this is no longer the case today. The confusion is not without consequences for any theory based on the current situation of the relation between the proletariat and capital, on the comprehension of current struggles and on *the revolution as produced overcoming of this cycle of struggle*. That is to say, on the way one takes these struggles as really productive of their overcoming (practically and theoretically) and not as to be judged in relation to this overcoming *already* posed as a norm. The history of class struggle is production and not realisation.

[48]p. 38

[23] For an explanation of *TC*'s concept of "programmatism" see below pp. 155-161 and Afterword p. 215.

Human, All Too Human?

A reply to 'Normative History and the Communist Essence of the Proletariat' by Théorie Communiste. Originally published as 'Humain, Trop Humain?', appendix to *Quand Meurent Les Insurrections* (*When Insurrections Die*), (La Sociale, Montreal 2000), pp. 69–77.

Translated by *Endnotes*.

It is for the reader to judge whether, as Théorie Communiste think, *When Insurrections Die* explains what happened by what didn't happen. We believe that in that article we set out first what proletarians actually did, and then what they weren't able or didn't want to do. "Yet no lessons but negative ones can be drawn from all these undertakings [the struggles of the German proletariat from 1919 to 1923]… The lesson learned was how not to proceed."[1] To jump back and forth between yesterday and tomorrow has its dangers, but is more illuminating than the explanation according to which every social movement ineluctably ends up where it is driven by its epoch.

> "Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution

[1] Paul Mattick, 'Otto Rühle and the German Labour Movement', 1935, in Anti-Bolshevik Communism (Merlin Press, 1978).

the prime objective was now to force the proletarians into reconstructing the economy. The workers were too preoccupied with bread and butter demands to put their minds and energy into a "reign of labour" nobody really cared for, nor sought to establish. The 1947–48 strikes offer an excellent illustration of this: they proved the ability of the French *CP* (and of its Italian neighbour) to recuperate and streamline the class struggle potentials it had been repressing since the end of the war.

Italy: 1945

As early as 1942, Italy was shaken by a strike wave that culminated in the April 25, 1943 insurrection that drove the Germans out of Turin after five days of street fighting. A national union of all parties was set up, dominated by the Stalinists (at Fiat-Mirafiori, 7,000 workers out of 17,000 belonged to the *CP*). Economic recovery was given top priority. In September 1945, the Metalworkers' union stated that "the toiling masses are willing to accept more sacrifices [lower wages, transfers, firing of those who have other incomes, partial redundancy] so that Italy can be born again … We must increase production and develop labour: there lies the unique road to salvation."

In December, the National Liberation Committees turned into Company Management Committees, or rather they took over those bodies created under Mussolini's corporatism. The main role of every *CMC* was to help put people back to work and enhance hierarchy. Its method was a mixture of Taylorism and Stakhanovism: youth brigades, volunteers' groups, material incentives, bonuses for cleaning and maintaining machines… The idea was to arouse "the enthusiasm of the working classes for the productive effort".

Reality stood in stark contrast to propaganda. The struggle for better work conditions remained strong, and enthusiasm for production quite low. A *CMC* official admitted that the

the greatness of his craft. To him, work was work and nothing else.[12]

Productivist practices and speeches also filled a gap. Everyone, including the common man, claimed to be a patriot and accused the bourgeoisie as a whole of collaboration with the Germans. Coal was also the prime energy source, and a precious one in a devastated economy. Let's add a direct political cause to this near fusion between patriotism and productivism: it helped people forget the support given to the Hitler-Stalin pact by the French *CP*, its denunciation of the war in 1939–41 as "imperialist", and its late involvement in the anti-German Resistance.

Putting the proletarians back to work meant reintegrating them into the national community, and punishing those bosses who'd been overtly collaborationist. This is why Renault was nationalised in 1945.

Branding the bourgeoisie as anti-labour and un-French was one and the same thing, and it went along with self-managerial appearances. But this was all the more possible because in France the *CP* did not really aspire to power. Wherever it did (in Eastern Europe for instance), it did not bother with such slogans. In fact, the average French (or Italian, or American…) Stalinist was convinced that socialist countries did their best for the welfare of the masses, but certainly not that the Russian or Polish workers ran the factories – everything for the people's good, nothing by the people themselves…

The whole post-war story looks like a shadow theatre. No more than the bosses, did unions and workers' parties ever try to promote labour as a class, or develop a wage-earners' democracy (even a superficial one) inside the firms. After the troubled 1920s, after the persistent rejection of work of the 1930s,

[12] Constant Malva, *Ma nuit au jour le jour* (Labour, 2001). At the same time, Belgium had to import thousands of Italians because the local workers were reluctant to go down the mine.

> are already present or at least in the course of formation."[2]

So be it. It remains for us to determine these conditions, and which goal they correspond to. Otherwise we limit ourselves to demonstrating how what had to happen happened. To reconstruct two hundred years of class struggles from the knowledge which we now have of them is not without interest. But what privilege permits the observer in the year 2000 to know that his standpoint is ultimately the right one? Nothing can guarantee that in 2050, after 50 more years of capitalism, an even more broad-ranging overview won't establish for x + y reasons the ways in which the proletarians of the year 2000 (and with them TC along with G. Dauvé) remained historically constrained by the limits of their times, and thus that communism wasn't actually in the offing in the year 2000 any more than it was in 1970 or 1919, but that now a new period is ushering itself in, allowing us to genuinely grasp the past from the new, proper viewpoint. Nothing guarantees it, except the certainty of the opening of a totally different historical epoch towards the end of the 20th century. To be sure, the conviction of TC is well buttressed and argued. Despite everything, however, it is not a caricature to read a new version of the "final crisis" in this vision of a phase in which proletariat and capital are supposedly from now on face to face, enabling proletarians to call into question their own existence as class, thus posing the question of communism in all its nakedness.

More than a mere theoretical position, it is this way of situating oneself in relation to the world, this *ultimatism*, which is questionable.[3]

[2] Marx, Preface, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 1859 (MECW 29), p. 263.

[3] TN: Ultimatism — the confidence that one is in a position to grasp the ultimate truth.

Capitalism will only be non-reproducible the day when proletarians cease producing it. There is no objective limit to a social system. Proletarians only give themselves tasks that they are able to and *want* to resolve.

Théorie Communiste steers clear of the conditional and subjunctive modes. However, just as one of the traits of language is projection into the future, man is also characterised by his capacity to think what could be, to reinterpret the past on the basis of the collective *choices* made by social groups, and thus to consider what could have been. History is a conjunction of possibilities and wills. Freedom consists not in being able to do anything one wants, but in wanting what one can do. Which is another way of saying "Men make their own history … but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past"[4], circumstances which they don't invent, but which it is within their power to modify.

"Will", "freedom", "Man": these are all words which disturb the theoretical rigour of TC. Unfortunately, to refuse all concepts which are exterior to capitalism is to condemn oneself to thinking nothing but capitalism. The fate of capitalism is not intelligible on the basis of capitalism alone. To reject all concepts which refer to an outside of the capital/wage-labour structure amounts to building a model that is irrefutable because it refers only to itself. What would be the use in a proletarian structuralism?

We don't postulate an irreducible, ahistorical human nature which ends up bursting the capitalist fetter.

"Underneath labour lies activity", stated an article in *La Banquise*.[5] Idealism? Everything depends on the *underneath*. It is false to conceive of capitalism as a prison from which, one glorious dawn, will emerge a virtuality which today is enclosed.

[4] Marx, 18th Brumaire (MECW 11), p. 103.

[5] 'Sous Le Travail: l'Activité', La Banquise no. 4, 1986.

tees. With assistance from the administrative staff, they took care of production, pay, canteens and some social benefits, and asked for a say over hiring and firing. As a *CGT* official declared in 1944: "The workers are human beings, they want to know who they're working for… The worker must feel at home in the factory … and through the union get involved in the management of the economy".

But the haze of self-management assertions could not cloud a capitalist functioning that soon reappeared in its down-to-earth banality. Let's just take the example of the miner. Much has been made of his pride and his eagerness to mine coal. We've seen newsreels of Thorez (the *CP* leader) exhorting thousands of miners in their work clothes to do what he called their class and national duty — to produce… and produce more and more.

There's no point in denying the miner's pride, but we have to assess its scope and limits. Every social group develops an image of itself and feels proud of what it does and of what it thinks it is. The colliers' self-esteem was socially conditioned. The official Miner's Status (which dates back to that period) granted quite a few advantages, like free medical care and heating, but also put the mining areas under a paternalistic supervision. The *CGT* controlled labour and daily life. Being regarded as a loafer was close to being treated as a saboteur, or even as a pro-Nazi. It was up to the foreman to decide how much coal was to be mined. Piecework ruled. To put it mildly, what productive eagerness there was lacked spontaneity.

Real miners' pride had more to do with the community of labour (festivals, rituals, solidarity…) than with the content of work, and even less with its alleged purpose (to produce for the renaissance of France). In the 30s and 40s, the diary of a radical miner like Constant Malva never mentions the beauty or

In November, some railwaymen refused to come on Saturday afternoon.

Union officials, trying to bridge the gap between government and shop-floor, retaliated by reintroducing piece rates and keeping a careful eye on working hours, in order to fight absenteeism and theft. Some went as far as forbidding singing at work. Unauthorized leaving of one's work station could lead to a 3-day dismissal, with a 3 to 5 day wage cut. To get rid of the *immorality* adverse to maximum efficiency, the *CNT* suggested closing bars, concert and dance halls at 10 p.m. There was talk of putting prostitutes back on the straight and narrow path thanks to the therapy of work. Laziness was stigmatised as individualistic, bourgeois and (needless to say) fascist. In January 1938, the *CNT* daily, *Solidaridad Obrera*, published an article — 'We Impose Strict Discipline in the Workplace' — that was to be reproduced several times in the *CNT* and *UGT* press, pressing the workers not to behave as they used to, i.e. not to sabotage production, and not to work as little as possible. "Now everything (was) completely different" because industry was laying "the foundations of a communist society".

With the exception of the anarchist rank and file (and dissidents like the Friends of Durruti) and the *POUM*, the parties and unions who stood for a reign of labour were the same who did everything to prevent that ideology from becoming a reality, and to make work remain nothing but work. In 1937, the debate was over, and the contradiction soon brought to a close — by force.

France: 1945

As early as 1944, a number of French companies went under union control, sometimes under union management, as in the Berliet heavy vehicle plant. Throughout the country, several hundred factories were supervised by workers' commit-

That would presuppose an always already existing positivity, constrained by capital and waiting to escape.

What exists, on the contrary, neither anterior nor exterior to capital, but consubstantial with it, and as indispensable condition of its functioning, is the universal scope of living labour, from which it feeds every day.

Not in the sense in which labour is presumed as the essential characteristic of Man defined as *homo faber*.

More simply, proletarians are not bovines. A man is not put to work like an animal is. The most manual occupation demands more than mere expenditure of muscle: a grasp, an anticipation of the gesture, a *savoir-faire* not eliminated by Taylorism, an acquired skill which the worker can then transmit. This faculty includes the representation of what other workers do and are, including if they live 10,000km away. The horse can refuse the work demanded of it, kill its master, escape and finish its days free, but it cannot initiate another form of life which reorganises the life of the former master as well. Capital is only capital because it exploits not only the product of labour but that which is human: a power to work, an energy which is always collective, which capital manages but can never completely dominate, which it depends on and which can put it into crisis — or even a revolution.

Proletarianisation is not the loss of some prior existing thing, but the exploitation of a human capacity. *Alienation* is only transhistorical to the extent that capitalism recapitulates a multi-millenarian past. Something becomes *other*: this is certainly one of the characteristics of wage-labour. The latter effects a dispossession, not of an undefinable humanity, but of time constrained, energy used, acts forced by capital which is thereby valorised. What the proletarian loses every day is not a strip of some eternal nature, but a force of life, a social capacity which the beast of burden does not have at its disposal, and which is thus a reality internal to the wage

relation. It's not a question of introducing a human dimension into the analysis, but of seeing that it is to be found there.

A fundamental contribution of the German-Dutch Left, and its descendents, is to have emphasised this.

> "If the worker is, even from the economic point of view, more than a machine, it is because he produces for the capitalist more than he costs him, and above all because in the course of his labour he manifests the creativity, the capacity to produce ever more and ever better, than any productive class of previous periods ever possessed. When the capitalist treats the proletariat as livestock, he learns quickly to his expense that livestock cannot fulfil the function of the worker, because the productivity of over-exploited workers decreases rapidly. This is the deep root of the contradictions of the modern system of exploitation and the historical reason of its failure, of its incapacity to stabilise itself."[6]

Socialisme ou Barbarie, like councilism, reduced the generic character which is the foundation of wage-labour to the dimension of its management. This fact, however, cannot blind us to that which these currents, which reflect the struggles for self-activity and autonomy against the bosses, bureaucracy and the State, brought to light: it is the proletariat which capitalism places in a situation of universality.

The important thing is not that proletarians produce riches (which for the most part impoverish us), but that they themselves are the ever more totalising but never total commodification of activity and life. Since the proletarian is the commodity which produces all the others, he contains them all, holds the key to his own exploitation, and in negating himself

[6] Socialisme ou Barbarie no. 1, 1949.

Another future was in search of itself, and it carried with it the superseding of work as a separate activity. The main objective was to organise social life without the ruling classes, or "outside" them. The Spanish proletarians, in the factories as well as in the fields, did not aim at developing production, but at living free. They weren't liberating production from bourgeois fetters, they were more plainly doing their best to liberate themselves from bourgeois domination.[11]

In practice, the democratic management of the company usually meant its union management by *CNT* and *UGT* (the socialist union) activists or officials. It's they who described self-governance of production as the road to socialism, but it does not seem that the rank and file identified itself with such a prospect.

Loathing work had long been a permanent feature of Spanish working class life. It continued under the Popular Front. This resistance was in contradiction with the programme (particularly upheld by the anarcho-syndicalists) calling the proles to get fully involved in the running of the workplace. The workers showed little interest in factory meetings which discussed the organising of production. Some collectivised companies had to change the meeting day from Sunday (when nobody cared to turn up) to Thursday. Workers also rejected piece rates, neglected working schedules, or deserted the place. When piecework was legally abolished, productivity fell. In February 1937, the *CNT* metalworkers' union regretted that too many workers took advantage of industrial injuries.

[11] Similar experiences took place in other countries and continents. In 1945, in the north of Vietnam, 30,000 miners elected councils, ran the mines for a while, controlled the public services, the railways, the post office, imposed equal pay for all, and taught people to read, until the Vietminh put its foot down. As a Vietnamese revolutionary recalled later, they wished to live "without bosses, without cops". Promoting work was far from being their prime motive or concern.

and Popular Front spokesmen kept insisting on a "pause" in demands, and on the necessity to rearm France. But the proletarians took advantage of the slackening of the military style factory discipline that had been enforced since the 1929 crash. In the Spring of 1936, they'd got into the habit of coming in late, leaving early, not coming at all, slowing down work and disobeying orders. Some would walk in drunk. Many refused piece rates. At Renault, stoppages and go-slows resulted in a productivity that was lower in 1938 than two years before. In the aircraft industry, piece rates were virtually abandoned. That trend did not prevail only in big factories, but also in construction work and plumbing. It's after the failure of the November '38 general strike (which aimed to defend the 40 hour week), and after the government had called in the police and army to intimidate and beat up strikers (Paris lived in an undeclared state of siege for 24 hours) that discipline was restored and working hours greatly extended, with a resulting increase in production and productivity. The centre-right leader Daladier (formerly one of the leaders of the Popular Front) rightly boasted he was "putting France back to work".

Spain: 1936[10]

Apart from farming estates, many companies were collectivised and production re-started by the personnel. This was often because the boss had fled, but sometimes to "punish" one who'd stayed but sabotaged production to harm the Popular Front. That period gave birth to a multitude of meaningful experiences, like waiters refusing tips on the basis that they weren't servants. Other endeavours tried to suppress money circulation and develop non-mercantile relationships between production and between people.

[10] See note 8 above.

as commodified-being, can revolutionise the world of the commodity. No previous exploited class lived a similar potentiality.

In fact, even if they died from overwork, the slave, the serf, the peasant under the yoke of the *corvée* and tax, the artisan and the worker before the industrial revolution, were only ferociously exploited in one part of their existence, a large portion of which remained outside the control of the dominant class. The serf's vegetable garden wasn't of interest to the lord. Modern proletarians produce the totality of material life, they lose it, then they receive it back in the form of the commodity and the spectacle, and this takes the form of the global circulation of goods and labour. It's for this reason that capitalism was theorised a hundred and fifty years ago as the realisation, if not the completion, of a double tendency of the universalisation of humanity and its alienation.

Between 1830 and 1848, a minority perceived society at a limit-point: proletarians can only reappropriate the totality of the conditions of life, "not only to achieve self-activity, but, also, merely to safeguard their very existence."[7] The announced revolution will use productive forces, but won't be a revolution of the *producers*. Technology is only valid as a flowering of individuals, with the supersession of professional capacities: "now the isolation of individuals and each person's particular way of gaining his livelihood have themselves become accidental."[8]

> "Thus, while the fugitive serfs only wished to have full scope to develop and assert those conditions of existence which were already there, and hence, in the end, only arrived at free labour, the proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, have to abolish hitherto prevailing condition of their existence (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to then), namely, labour. Thus

[7] Marx & Engels, The German Ideology (MECW 5), p. 87.
[8] ibid. p. 88

> they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, hitherto, the individuals, of which society consists, have given themselves collective expression, that is, the state; in order, therefore, to assert themselves as individuals, they must overthrow the State."[9]

Beyond the glaring contradiction between an increasing production of wealth which impoverishes its producers, the more radical perceived a historic opening, through the contradiction of *labour*, "which is now the only possible but, as we see, negative form of self-activity."[10]

From the clash between artisans a new figure could emerge beyond the creator-artist and the proletarian-servant of the machine. Thanks to commodified labour, which was unattached and indifferent to its content, but collective, it became possible to envisage association, and the supersession of the wage form (still too recent to appear "natural").

The "Proletariat" is thus conceived as that which will compose another society. It already configures a kind of society, since classes dissolve themselves in it. It sucks in artisans and peasants, attracts a proportion of "intellectuals", and doesn't form a bloc or entity, but expresses a social decomposition (or a recomposition as revolutionaries hope). Proletarians experience unemployment, poverty, uprooting, the breakdown of the family, of customs, of identities, of values, and at the same time act collectively (as seen in insurrections, chartism, trade-unions, Tristan's *Union Ouvrière*, Luddism too, of which the later trade unions gave the falsified image of a brute force, spontaneous but limited). The proletariat of before 1848 is an ensemble disaggregated enough to criticise itself, but still communitarian enough to want to struggle, and by the breaking-down of

[9] ibid. p. 80
[10] ibid. p. 87

to have a good time. The conscious festive dimension was far more important than an alleged will to prove productive abilities superior to those of the bourgeois. Very few even contemplated worker management of the occupied plants. A harsh and alienating place was turned into liberated space, if only for a few weeks. It certainly was no revolution, nor its dawning, but a transgression, a place and time to enjoy a somewhat illegal yet fully legitimate holiday, while winning substantial reforms. The striker was proud to show his family round the premises, but his long collective meals, his dancing and singing signalled his joy *not* to be at work. As in the *US* a little later, the sit-down was a re-appropriation of the present, a (short) capture of time for oneself.

The vast majority of the strikers understood the situation better than Trotsky ("The French revolution has begun") or Marceau Pivert ("Everything's possible now").[9] They realised that 1936 did not herald social upheaval, and they were neither ready nor willing to make it happen. They grabbed what they could, especially in terms of labour time: the 40-hour week and paid holiday stand as symbols of that period. They also preserved the possibility of selling their labour power to capital as it existed, not to a collective capitalism that would have been run by the labour movement. The *CGT* kept a low profile on a possible new society based on socialised work. June '36 had a more humble and more realistic purpose — to enable the worker to sell himself without being treated as an animated thing. This was also the period when recreational and educational activities organised for and sometimes by the masses became popular: culture brought to the factories, "quality" theatre for the common people, youth hostels, etc.

Resistance to work went on for a long while after the sit-downs, in a more and more hostile environment. Bosses

[9] Pivert was the leader of a left opposition in the socialist party (which later formed the *psop* in 1938).

"The future world must be a workers' world", as a Chinese communist put it around 1920. This was the dreamland of skilled labour. However, after 1914–18, even where in Europe the movement was at its most radical, in Germany, where a sizeable minority attacked unions and parliamentary democracy, and where groups like the *KAPD* would implement a *workers*' programme, there were hardly any attempts to take over production in order to manage it. Whatever plans they may have nurtured, in practice neither the Essen and Berlin workers nor those in Turin put work at the centre of society, even of a socialist one. Factories were used as strongholds in which the proletarians would entrench themselves, not as levers of social reorganisation. Even in Italy, the plant was not a bastion to be defended at all costs. Many Turin workers would occupy their workplace in the daytime, leave at night and come back in the morning. (Such behaviour will re-occur in Italy's Hot Autumn, 1969.) This is no sign of extreme radicality. Those proletarians abstained from changing the world as much as from promoting work, and "only" snatched from capital what they could get. That unformulated refusal of work contrasted with thousands of pro-work posters and speeches. It just showed that these proletarians weren't totally caught in the framework where they'd been trapped, and where they'd trapped themselves.

France: June 1936[8]

Much has been written about the transformation of factories into closed-in workers' fortresses. But the June '36 sit-downs never aimed to re-start production. Their objective was less to *protect* the machinery (which no saboteur threatened) than to use it to put pressure on the boss and

[8] On France and Spain, see Micheal Seidman's well-researched *Workers Against Work during the Popular Front* (UCLA, 1991).

barriers between worker/non-worker, artisan/labourer, manual/intellectual… accede to a free association. The organised workers' movement subsequently both took on and denied this heritage, and the communist horizon has been fixed on sociology for more than a century.

Under the weight of the epoch, Marx himself, although aiming for "a description of the characteristics of communist society"[11] considered it increasingly *on the basis of capitalism*, and by dint of criticising political economy became enclosed within it. What is the interest in scientifically "proving" exploitation, instead of exposing how exploitation exploits that which can produce communism?

It's not a case of opting for the "young" Marx against the "old" Marx, but of understanding that the "young" Marx contains the "old" Marx a lot more than the "old" Marx contains the "young" Marx. Thus the intellectual involution echoes a historical stabilisation. The perspective is impoverished in the International Workingmen's Association or the Commune when compared to that of the middle of the century, which the author of the *1844 Manuscripts* synthesised the best, but which others had also expressed.[12]

The revolution didn't occur around 1848, and it would be vain to expect that computerisation will finally render "historically necessary" in the year 2000 that which large-scale mechanised industry was supposed to achieve before 1914 or nascent automation after 1960.

What is true is that every profound reorganisation of the productive system materially impoverishes the workers, but also dispossesses them of a relative mastery over their work, and unleashes resistance and revolts, often conservative, but

[11] Amadeo Bordiga, 'Trajectoire et catastrophe de la forme capitaliste dans la classique et monolithique construction marxiste', Réunion de Piombino, September 1957. (French translation of the article which appeared in Il Programma Communista in 1957).

[12] cf. Alain Maillard, La Communauté des égaux (éd. Kimé, 1999).

revolutionary perhaps. The calling into question by capitalism of the forms of wage-labour opens up a path of rupture with the wage condition. Each time, nothing guarantees that a communist movement will be able or want to take advantage of it, but the possibility is there, which makes of the proletariat the "overthrowing class".[13]

A hypothesis: we are living in a new charnel-epoch in which capitalism is able to create poles of profit for itself, technically innovate and multiply consumer goods, create employment and/or income, calm riots, but not unify the global society of generalised labour at the very moment in which the latter becomes inessential. From the fetid cellars of Lille or Manchester in 1840 to the living-rooms of council tower-blocks where the *VCR* has pride of place, the problem remains: how to put wage-earners to work if they are profitable, and what to do with them when they are not? At one extreme, in China, 100 million uprooted ex-rurals which the capitalist city won't be able to integrate. At the other end of the chain, in Seine-Saint-Denis (*TN*: Parisian suburb): school until 22 years old; training schemes; insignificant, precarious jobs; benefits. Between the two, the United States. For Emmanuel Todd (*L'illusion économique*), "the biggest success of the American system of production is anti-economic". The question isn't whether there is no way out of the situation for capital, but whether it reopens a way out for the proletariat as a class not of workers, but of the *critique of work*.

The limit of capital is that it is unable to do without labour, which it indeed generalises, making millions of beings enter into wage labour, at the same time as it reduces labour to a negligible role. To remedy this, thinkers such as Andre Gorz propose the delinking of money from labour, in order to accord to everybody a share in consumption, whether they have participated in production or not. Such a society is impossible:

[13] Marx, The German Ideology (MECW 5), p. 53.

a relatively autonomous work team made it logical for him to think he could collectively manage the factory, and on the same model the whole society, which was conceived of as an interconnection of firms that had to be democratically re — unified to do away with bourgeois anarchy. The workers perform tasks that the boss merely organises — so the boss could be dispensed with. Workers' or "industrial" democracy was an extension of a community (both myth and reality) that existed in the union meeting, in the strike, in the workers' district, in the pub or the café, in a specific language, and in a powerful network of institutions that shaped working class life from the aftermath of the Paris Commune to the 1950s or 60s.

This was no longer the case for the industrial or service sector unskilled worker. One cannot envisage managing a labour process that has been as fragmented inside the plant as between geographically separate production units. When a car or a toothbrush comprises components from two or three continents, no collective worker is able to regard it as his own. Totality is split. Work loses its unity. Workers are no longer unified by the content of tasks, nor by the globality of production. One can only wish to (self-)manage what one masters.

Taylorised workers (like those in the *US* in the 1930s) did not form councils. The collective organ of struggle was not at the same time a potential collective management organ. The strike and occupation committee was only an aggregate instrument of solidarity, and provided the leadership of that *specific* movement: it was not a body that would represent or incarnate labour for *other* tasks (particularly the running of the firm). The Taylorised workplace leaves little room for managerial aspirations.

It's interesting to observe that after 1945, workers' councils re-emerged in State capitalist countries that remained mainly in the large scale mechanised industry stage, and were hardly penetrated by Scientific Management: East Germany, 1953; Poland, 1955 and 1971; Hungary, 1956; Czechoslovakia, 1968.

cialist society. The *KAPD* did not deny the alienation inherent to work, *yet* wanted it imposed on everyone for a transition period to develop the bases of communism to come. That contradiction calls for an explanation.

Workers' Management as a Utopia of Skilled Labour

The aspiration to set up the workers as the ruling class and to build a workers' world was at its highest in the heyday of the labour movement, when the Second and Third Internationals were more than big parties and unions: they were a way of life, a counter-society. That aspiration was carried by *Marxism* as well as by *anarchism* (particularly in its revolutionary syndicalist form). It coincided with the growth of large scale industry (as opposed to manufacture earlier, and Scientific Management later).[7]

"Let the miners run the mine, the workers run the factory…" — this only makes sense when the people involved can identify with what they do, and when they collectively produce what they are. Although railwaymen do not manufacture train engines, they are entitled to say: *We* run the railway lines, *we* are the railway system. This was not the case of the craftsmen pushed together in the manufacture: they could dream of an industrialisation that would turn its back on the big factory and return to the small workshop, and to a private independent property freed of money fetters (for example, thanks to free credit *à la* Proudhon, or to Louis Blanc's People's Bank).

In contrast, for the skilled electricity or metal worker, for the miner, railwayman or docker, there was no going back. His Golden Age was not to be found in the past, but in a future based on giant factories… without bosses. His experience in

[7] Though Marx does not speak of "systems of production", the concept is clearly in his writings. cf. Marx, *Capital* vol. 1 (*MECW 35*), pp. 341–509.

even if it were ten times more automated, our world would still rest upon labour. Proletarians will remain the necessary evil of capitalism.

A question: is it possible to pass from the moment where capital refuses many proletarians (in particular young ones) to the refusal of this world and its labour by proletarians (particularly lots of young ones)? What will be done by these "masses resulting from the drastic dissolution of society, mainly of the middle estate, that form the proletariat…"

> "… By proclaiming the dissolution of the hereto existing world order, the proletariat merely proclaims the secret of its own existence, for it is in fact the dissolution of that world order. By demanding the negation of private property, the proletariat merely raises to the rank of a principle of society what society has made the principle of the proletariat, what without its own co-operation, is already incorporated in it as the negative result of society."[14]

On the basis of what he had in front of his eyes — i.e. nascent industrialisation, Marx theorised a period (to come) of dislocation of classes, which was simultaneously the effect of a profound social crisis and the conscious action of proletarians. For him, the proletariat of 1844, but also one hundred or two hundred years later, is the ensemble of categories having in common that they live only from the sale of their labour-power, whether they are in work or without it, partially employed, precarious or protected by a statute but susceptible (if not, a brother, or a daughter…) to falling into a fragile category. The proletariat exists as dissolution of classes in the sense that it is

[14] Marx, Introduction, A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1843 (MECW 3), p. 187.

and effects this dissolution. It is both the product and the process of this dissolution, by a revolution "in which, further, the proletariat rids itself of everything that still clings to it from its previous position in society."[15] It is not a question of it forming a bloc like an army against another, but that it puts into practice the negation which it is already, going beyond individualism as well as massification.

> "…standing over against these productive forces, we have the majority of the individuals from whom these forces have been wrested away, and who, robbed thus of all real life-content, have become abstract individuals, but who are, however, only by this fact put into a position to enter into relation with one another as individuals."[16]

> "…the communal relationship into which the individuals of a class entered, and which was determined by their common interests over against a third party, was always a community to which these individuals belonged only as average individuals, only insofar as they lived within the conditions of existence of their class — a relationship in which they participated not as individuals but as members of a class. With the community of revolutionary proletarians, on the other hand, who take their conditions of existence and those of all members of society under their control, it is just the reverse; it is as individuals that the individuals participate in it. It is just this combination of individuals (assuming the advanced stage of modern productive forces, of course) which puts the conditions of the free development and

[15] Marx, The German Ideology (MECW 5), p. 88.

[16] ibid. p. 87.

Later, in his *Right to be Lazy* (1880), Lafargue was thinking ahead of his time when he attacked the 1848 "Right to Work": work degrades, he says, and industrial civilisation is inferior to so-called primitive societies. A "strange folly " pushed the modern masses into a life of work. But Marx's son-in-law also belonged to his time because he partook of the myth of technical liberation: "the machine is the redeemer of mankind". He did not advocate the suppression of work, but its reduction to 3 hours daily. Though pressing a few buttons is usually less destructive than sweating from morning till night, it does not put an end to the *separation* between the productive act and the *rest of life*. (It's this separation which defines work. It was unknown in primitive communities, uncommon or incomplete in the pre-industrial world, and it took centuries to turn it into a habit and norm in Western Europe.) Lafargue's provocative insight was a critique of work within work. Interestingly, this pamphlet (with the *Manifesto*) long remained among the most popular classics of the *SFIO*, the old French socialist party. *The Right to be Lazy* helped present work as a boon and an evil, as a blessing and a curse, but in any case as an inescapable reality, as unavoidable as *the economy*.

The labour movement wished (in opposing ways, of course, according to its organisations being reformist or revolutionary) the workers to prove their ability to manage the economy and the whole society. But there's a discrepancy between these sets of ideas and the behaviour of wage-earners who did their best to get away from the "implacable imposition of work" (point 8 of the *KAPD* programme). That phrase isn't trivial. It's significant it should come from the *KAPD*, a party whose programme included the generalisation of grassroots workers' democracy, but came up against the reality of work and its role in a so-

lition of private property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of 'labour'." Marx, *Notes on Frederich List*, 1845 (*MECW 4*), p. 279.

class is moving forward with discipline and obeying its organisation. Tomorrow, in a system that it will have created itself, it will achieve everything."

Reality proved different. The workers showed no desire to increase the quantity or quality of work. The absence of significant production during the occupation movement reveals the weakness of the ideology of a producer proud of his labour, and the impossibility of liberated and socialised work. Buozzi, general secretary of the Metalworkers' union, admitted it: "Everyone knew that the workers interrupted work on the most futile pretext." In a week, between August 21st and 28th, 1920, the 15,000 workers of Fiat-Centre decreased production by 60%.

At Fiat-Rome, a banner proclaimed: "The man who will not work shall not eat" (a statement borrowed from Saint-Paul). Other banners at Fiat-Centre repeated: "Work elevates man". Yet the succession of stoppages at Fiat-Brevetti led the workers' council to force the personnel back to work, and to create a "workers' prison" to deal with theft and laziness. Because of "the extravagant number of people taking days off", Fiat's central council threatened to fire all those who'd been away for more than two days.

Caught up between the desire of union and party activists to reorganise work in a socialist manner, and their own reluctance to work, the workers had not hesitated long.

No Right to be Lazy

Let's rewind the course of history a little. We'd be mistaken to think no-one cared about a theoretical critique of work before the 1960s. In the 1840s, Marx and others (Stirner for example) defined communism as the abolition of classes, of the State *and of work*.[6]

[6] "'Labour' by its very nature is unfree, unhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the abo-

> movement of individuals under their control — conditions which were previously abandoned to chance and had won an independent existence over against the separate individuals just because of their separation as individuals, and because of the necessity of their combination."[17]

According to Théorie Communiste, "the proletarian of the young Marx is the personal individual for whom the previous social determinations have become a matter of contingency, and it is this situation in itself which is posed as revolutionary."[18] However this proletarian evoked by Marx is more than an individual, as he shares (in his head and his actions) his fate with millions of others. Is he so individual, this individual who is weighed down by a historical constraint, this being who is endlessly "excluded" from production then coercively re-included, and by the same token who, because his condition doesn't enclose him in a factory, an occupation or a particular place, is able to do what the *CGT* metalworker proved himself to be incapable of: to pass from one category to another, not to think of himself one-sidedly as "worker" *or* "out of work", to manifest a certain fluidity, a freedom…

Proletarians can fight exploitation, either to merely impose some limits upon it, or to bring an end to it by producing communist social relations. How does the link between the two operate? Even the most resolved and most autonomous movement will only challenge society if it manifests the practical demand for another life, in a word if its acts contain or acquire a universal dimension. The communist revolution is precisely the moment of fusion between the struggle against exploitation and the struggle against alienation. No historical dialectic can deliver the key to this in advance.

[17] ibid. p. 80.

[18] Théorie Communiste no. 14, 1997 p. 19.

Love of Labour? Love of Labour Lost…

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A historical failure: 154 years after Marx's and Engels' *Manifesto*, that could be a blunt but not too unfair summary of the communist movement.

One interpretation of such a miscarriage centres on the importance or prevalence given to work. From the 1960s onwards, a more and more visible resistance to work, sometimes to the point of open rebellion, has led quite a few revolutionaries to revisit the past from the point of view of the acceptance or rejection of work. Former social movements are said to have failed because the labourers tried to have labour rule society, i.e. tried to liberate themselves by using the very medium of their enslavement: work. In contrast, true emancipation would be based on the refusal of work, seen as the only effective subversion of bourgeois and bureaucratic domination alike. Only work refusal would have a universal dimension able to transcend quantitative claims, and to put forward a qualitative demand for an altogether different life.

Russia was to experience the charms of material incentives, elite workers, hard and forced labour camps, and "communist Sundays". But let's not turn history upside down. The Russian proles did not fail because of a misguided belief in the myth of liberation through work: it's their failure that gave a free rein to an unprecedented glorification of work. Who truly believed in a "communist Sunday", except those who could expect some symbolic or material reward out of it? Stakhanovism was to be the ultimate argument in that debate, and caused quite a few reactions, including the murder of some elite workers by their mates. As for Alexei Stakhanov, he died more addicted to vodka than to coal.

Italy: 1920

Reading Gramsci and the *Ordine Nuovo* on the Italian workers that took over the factories in 1920 is like going through the impressive yet contradictory saga of a movement that was both formidable and tame. Violent means (including the use of guns to guard the plants) mixed with a definite moderation in the actual demands. The Fiat proletarian is described thus: "intelligent, human, proud of his professional dignity"; "he doesn't bow before the boss"; "He is the socialist worker, the protagonist of a new mankind…"; "The Italian workers… have never opposed the innovations that bring about lower costs, work rationalisation and the introduction of a more sophisticated automatism". (Gramsci, *Notes on Machiavelli*)

At the metalworkers' union conference (November, 1919), Tasca, one of the editors of *Ordine Nuovo*, called for the shop stewards to study, *the bourgeois system of production and work processes to achieve the maximum technical capacities necessary to manage the factory in a communist society*. One last quote from *Ordine Nuovo* in September 1920: "The workers wish … to prove that they can do without the boss. Today the working

belong to them." Still, at that time, the decree on workers' control expressed a balance of power — shop-floor militancy maintained some collective rank and file management, directly or through union channels. But the leaders had made no secret of their objectives. Trotsky's *Terrorism and Communism* defined man as a "lazy animal" that must be forced to work. For the Bolsheviks, workers' control only served to curb bourgeois power, help wage-earners to discipline themselves, and teach management to a handful of future executives.

The oppositions' platforms (even the radical one by the Miasnikov group) might appear as an attempt to assert the value of work and socialise it, but after 1920 with a world balance of power that was unfavourable to wage labour such an attempt was even less feasible. Those proletarian expropriations and re-organisations of production that took place were emergency measures. It would have been impossible to turn these partial spontaneous efforts into something systematic, and the proletarians did not bother to. Labour kept away from the programmes that wished to make it (and not the Bolshevik party) the real ruler.

In 1921, the toiling masses stood outside such a debate. The Workers' Opposition's proposals, like those of Lenin's and Trotsky's, dealt with the best way to put people to work in a society the workers had lost control of. The Russian proletarians weren't keen to discuss the ways and means of their own exploitation. The debate that ensued did not oppose socialisation of labour unbound, to labour under constraint, it was about a rearrangement of power at the top.

The Russian revolutionary crisis shows that as long as capital reigns, labour can't be liberated and must be imposed upon the wage-earners, and that its persistence in one form or another is an unmistakable sign of a failed revolution. In 1917–21, the alternative was between abolishing wage labour or perpetuating exploitation, with no possible third option.

The Situationists were among the most articulate proponents of this view: "Never work!"[1] Later, in Italy particularly, a number of formal and informal groups, often called *autonomous*, attempted to develop and systematise spontaneous anti-work activities.[2]

The refusal of work has become the underlying theme of many a theory on past and present struggles. Defeats are explained by the acceptance of work, partial successes by active shop-floor insubordination, and a revolution to come is equated with a complete rejection of work. According to this

[1] "*Ne travaillez jamais*": writing on a Paris wall, photographed in the *IS* no. 8, 1963. That same issue defined "the centre of the revolutionary project" as "nothing less than the suppression of work in the usual sense (as well as the suppression of the proletariat) and of all justifications of old style work".

[2] "Autonomy" is a misleading term, because it mixes activities and theories that vastly differed, though they were often present within the same groups. A large part of the "autonomous" movement was involved in grassroots anti-work action. On the other hand, *Operaismo* was using the critique of work as a unifying theme on which some organisation (sometimes genuinely democratic, sometimes similar to a party) could be built. *Operaismo* found the common element to all categories of proletarians in the fact that they were *all at work*, whether formal or unofficial, waged or un-waged, permanent or casual. So, even when it did promote shop-floor rebellion, *Operaismo*'s purpose was to have everyone's work acknowledged, through the supposedly unifying slogan of the "political wage". Instead of contributing to a dissolution of work into the whole of human activity, it wanted everyone to be treated as a worker (women, the jobless, immigrants, students, etc.). The critique of work was used as a tool to claim the generalisation of paid productive activity, i.e. of… wage-labour. *Operaismo* was fighting for the recognition of the centrality of labour, that is for something which is the opposite of the abolition of work. See for example *Zerowork* no. 1, 1975. This contradiction was expressed in *Potere Operaio*'s slogan: "From the fight for the wage to the abolition of wage-labour". Lack of space prevents us from going into details. Cf. the two very informative collections of articles and documents by Red Notes in the 70's: *Italy 1977–78. Living with an Earthquake, and Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*. Just to show that the critique of work exceeds the borders of so-called rich countries: *A Ballad Against Work*, A Publication for Collectivities, 1997, Majdoor Library, Autopin Jhuggi, NIT, Faridabad 121001, India.

analysis, in the past, workers shared the cult of production. Now they can free themselves of the delusion of work, because capitalism is depriving it of interest or human content, while making hundreds of millions of people jobless.

In Germany, Krisis recently gave an excellent illustration of the transformation of the anti-work stand into the philosopher's stone of revolution.[3]

But since the 70s, mainly in France, the role of work has also been reinterpreted in a different light: up to now the labouring classes have only tried to assert themselves as the class of labour and to socialise work, not to do away with it, *because* up to now capitalist development prevented communist prospects from emerging. Whatever the proletarians (or radical minorities) may have thought, they were fighting for a capitalism without capitalists, for a worker led capitalism. A real critique of work was impossible in the 60s-70s, and the '68 period is analysed as the last possible effort of labour to pose itself as the dominant pole *within* the capital/wage labour couple. Now things are completely different, because a restructured capital no longer leaves any scope for a workers' capitalism. *Théorie Communiste* has been the main exponent of this perspective.[4]

We're not lumping together people as different from each other as the SI and *Théorie Communiste*. We're only dealing with one important point they have in common: the belief that asserting the importance of labour was a major obstacle to revolution, and that this obstacle has been removed more by capitalist development than by the proletarians themselves. It seems to us that these views are false in regard to the facts, and even more so in regard to the method, the attitude in relation to the world to be transformed. However, their defenders clearly uphold revolution as communisation, destruction of the State

[3] Krisis, *Manifesto Against Work* (1999), now translated into French and English.

[4] *Théorie Communiste*, BP 17, 84300. Les Vignères. Also the two books by Roland Simon published by Senonevero.

workers, who initially had not been able or willing to run the factories in their own interests, were faced with new bosses who told them they now worked for themselves and for world socialism. They reacted as they usually do, by individual and collective resistance, active and passive. Even before 1921 and Kronstadt, some strikes, at the famous workers' bastion of the huge Putilov plant for instance, were suppressed in a bloodbath (as documented in the now available Cheka archives).

The inversion we are describing did not take place in a month or a year. A contradictory process, it allowed for the coexistence (often in the same person) of a revolutionary dynamic and a crystalisation of power looking to maintain itself at any price. The historical tragedy was that one part of the working class, organised in a party and in State power, forced the other part to work for a revolution… that by this very situation ceased to exist. That contradiction was perceived at once by the anarchists, soon by the German-Dutch Communist Left, and much later — if ever — by the Italian Left. In any case, it surely closed the door on any workers' capitalism.

The recurrent opposition to the Bolshevik majority – the Left Communists, the Makhnovshchina (which included industrial collectives), the Workers' Opposition, the Workers' Group – was an expression of that impossibility. It's no accident the debate on who should run the factories reached its climax in 1920, at the backward surge of the revolutionary wave. Then everything had been said and done, and the split between the masses and the party was complete: but it was only a negative split, as the proletarians didn't come up with an alternative to Bolshevik policy. If Miasnikov's Workers' Group was a small but genuine emanation of the rank and file, Kollontai's Workers' Opposition was the unions' voice — one bureaucracy against another.

But the party had the merit of coherence. As early as 1917, Lozovsky stated: "The workers must not figure the factories

and abolition of classes. So this essay will be less of a refutation than an attempt to think twice about work.

Before 1914

A profusion of data shows that for centuries the workers used their professional ability and dignity as justifications for what they regarded as their due. They acted as if their right to a fair wage (and to fair prices, in the "moral economy" described by E.P. Thompson) derived from their toil and competence.

But, if they claimed and rebelled *in the name of* work, were they fighting *for* a world where they would take their masters' place? Answering the question implies distinguishing between workers' practice and workers' ideology.

Old time social movements are depicted as endeavours to achieve a utopia where labour would be king. This certainly was one of their dimensions, but not the only one, nor the one that gave coherence to all the others. Otherwise, how do we account for the frequent demand to work *less*? In 1539, in Lyons, printing workers went on a four months strike for shorter hours and longer public holidays. In the 18th century, French paper-makers used to take "illegal" holidays. Marx mentions how English bourgeois were shocked by workers who, chose to work (and earn) less, by only coming to the factory four days a week instead of six.

"To live as a worker, or die as a fighter." The famous Lyons silk-workers' motto of the 1830s of course signifies a claim for work, but less for work as a positive reality than as a means of resisting deteriorating pay. The 1834 silk-workers' insurrection was not prompted by machines that would have deprived them of their jobs — the machines were already there. The workers actually fought the power of the merchants who allocated work at their own discretion and paid very little. When the silk-worker spoke highly of the quality of his silk, he was

force contributing by investing 50% of their wages (and 5% more in 1912). To be profitable, a cooperative had to combine high skills and income, popular support and outside financing. Self-management soon lost any reality. The plant went through a series of industrial disputes *directly* against the *CGT*, which stood in the dual position of the single union and the boss (it was the biggest shareholder): a several months' strike in 1912, 4 months in 1921, stoppages for 7 months in 1924, and so on. The co-op still existed in 1968.

Since the mid-19th century, cooperatives have lost their social impetus and all ambition for historical change. When today the Welsh miners of Towers Colliery buy out a workplace that the owners wanted to get rid of, and then manage it collectively, even those who support and praise them do not consider their market and human success as a solution that could be generalised.

Russia: 1917–21

Between February and October 1917, "workers' control" did little to restart production.[5] Later, though they were stimulated by a political power that owed to them its existence and strength, the proletarians hardly manifested any productive enthusiasm. They often lacked respect for what was supposed to be theirs: Victor Serge recalls how Petrograd workers would take machines apart and cut the belts to make slippers or soles that they sold on the market.

Lenin's party did not get to (and stay in) power through bureaucratic intrigues. It was built on proletarian struggles. But, for lack of social change, the Bolsheviks who'd become the new State remained at its head like any power does, promising a lot, promoting some and repressing others. The mass of the

[5] Stephen Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories 1917–18* (Cambridge *UP*, 1983)

not talking like a medieval master craftsman — his *life* was the subject-matter.

In June 1848, it is true that the closure of the National Workshops by the government led to the Paris insurrection. But these workshops were no social model, only a means to keep the jobless busy. The actual work done was socially unprofitable, and of no interest to the recipients. The insurgents rose to survive, not to defend a guaranteed nationalised or socialised form of work that they would have regarded as an embryo of socialism.

At the time, many strikes and riots took place against mechanization. They expressed the resistance of craftsmen anxious to save the (real and imagined) rich human content of their skills, but equally they tried to curb further exploitation. When Rouen textile workers managed to prevent more efficient machinery being installed, they were not fighting *for* a trade, they were putting a (temporary) stop to worsening living conditions. Meanwhile, other Normandy textile hands were asking for a 10-hour day, and construction workers for the end of overtime, which they regarded as a cause of accidents and unemployment.

As for the Paris Commune, when it took over a few firms, imposed a wage rate or forced owners to re-open the plants, its main purpose was to provide these wage-earners with an income. Taking charge of production was no priority for the Communards.

This short survey of the 19th century points to a juxtaposition of struggles. Some could be labelled *modern*. In that they aimed at higher wages and sometimes rejected work (in a nutshell, less working hours and more pay). Others aimed through producer and consumer cooperatives at a working class take over of industrialisation by which the working classes would put an end to capital and become a sort of total capital. *Association* was then a keyword that summed up the ambiguity of the time: it conveyed the ideas both of mercantile links and of fraternal unity. Many workers hoped that co-ops would be more competitive than private business, would eliminate capitalists from the market and from their social function, and maybe force them to join the associated workers. United labour would have beaten the bourgeois at their own game.

1848 tolled the death knell of the utopia of a wage-labour capital, of a working class that would become the ruling class and then the unique or *universal* class through the absorption of capital in associated labour. From then on, via a growing union movement, the workers will only be concerned with *their* share of the wage system, they won't try to compete with the monopoly of capital owned by the bourgeoisie, but to constitute themselves as a monopoly of labour power. The programme of a popular capitalism was on the wane. At the same time, the ruling classes gave up any attempt at the "different" capitalism imagined and sometimes practised by innovative and generous industrialists like Owen. At both ends of the wage system, capital and labour knew their place.

This explains the paradox of a social movement that was so keen on separating labour from capital, but which finally created so few producers' cooperatives. The ones that existed were born out of the will of enlightened bourgeois, or, if they had a worker origin, soon turned into business as usual.

The Albi Workers' Glassworks in the south of France illustrates this tendency. The highly skilled glass workers, still organised on a pre-1789 guild model, had kept their control over apprenticeship. It took 15 years to be a fully-fledged glassblower. Those labour aristocrats were paid twice as much as miners. In 1891, a strike of several months against the introduction of new technology only resulted in the creation of a union, which the management then tried to smash, thereby provoking another strike. The bosses locked-out and refused to reintegrate the most militant strikers. Out of this deadlock rose the idea of a co-op. This came into existence in 1892, after a national subscription with some bourgeois help, and the labour

Various Authors
Endnotes 1
Preliminary Materials for a Balance Sheet of the 20th Century
2008

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stituents of capitalist society. Whether it's peaceful or violent, the mere opposition of one class to the other leaves both facing each other. Naturally any ruling class denies the existence of class antagonisms. Still, in the early 19th century, the first to emphasise class confrontation weren't socialists, but bourgeois historians of the French revolution. What is revolutionary is not to uphold class struggle, but to affirm that such a struggle can end through a communist revolution.

Nowadays, the decay of classism and of the labour movement is visible and documented enough for us not to dwell upon it. Some revolutionaries have rejoiced over the demise of worker's identity and of the glorification of the working class as the class of labour, and they've interpreted that demise as the elimination of a major obstacle to revolution — which the labour institutions and that ideology no doubt were. But what has the critique of the world really gained by their withering away? We'd be tempted to say — not much, because of the rise of even softer practices and ideas. Just being freed of their workers' role and hopes didn't turn wage-earners into radical proletarians. So far, the crisis of the working class and of classism has not favoured subversion. The past twenty years have brought about neo-liberal, neo-social-democratic, neo-reactionary, neo-everything ideologies, the emergence of which has coincided with the symbolic annihilation of the working class. This wiping out is a product of capital class recomposition (unemployment, de-industrialisation, proletarianisation of office work, casualisation, etc.). It also results from the rejection by the wage-earners themselves of the most rigid forms of worker identity. But this rejection remains mainly negative. The proletarians have shattered the control of parties and unions over labour. (In 1960, anyone handing out an anti-union leaflet at a French factory gate risked being beaten up by the Stalinists.) But they haven't gone much further. The decline of workerism was accompanied by the loss of a point of view allowing a perspective on the whole of

this society, gauging and judging it *from the outside* in order to conceive and propose another. Proletarian autonomy has not taken advantage of bureaucratic decline.

We are experiencing a dislocation of class struggle. In the 60s-70s, the unskilled workers stood at the centre of the reproduction of the whole system, and other categories recognised themselves in the "mass worker". No social symbolical figure plays such a pivotal role — yet.

Work as a Fallen Idol

19th century and early 20th century communists often shared the progressivism of their time, and believed that a new industry and a new labour would emancipate humankind.[23] A hundred years later, we'd be naive to espouse the exact opposite views just because they happen to be fashionable. In fifty years, the praise of toil and sacrifice has become as outdated as the belief in the liberating Horn of Plenty of the economy.[24] This evolution is as much the result of the radical critique of the 1960s-70s, as of a deepening of capital — making labour productive today is achieved more through the work process itself than by outright discipline. The computer screen

[23] Marx's progressivism is both real and contradictory. He certainly worked out a linear sequence: primitive community — slavery — feudalism — capitalism — communism, with the side option of the "Asiatic mode of production". But his deep, longstanding interest in the Russian *mir* and in so-called primitive societies (cf. his notebooks published in 1972) prove that he thought it possible for some (vast) areas to avoid the capitalist phase. If Marx had been the herald of industrialisation he is often depicted as, he would have completed the six volumes he'd planned for *Das Kapital*, instead of accumulating notes on Russia, the East, etc. See 'Karl Marx & the Iroquois', *Arsenal/ Surrealist Subversion*, no. 4 (Black Swan Press 1989) and our *Re-Visiting the East and Popping in at Marx's Grave*, available on the Troploin site.

[24] Similarly, in 1900, it was "obvious" to ask for more technology. A hundred years later, it's the opposite that goes without saying: we "obviously" need less…

is now the immediate supervisor of millions of industrial and service sector wage-earners. In its most advanced sectors, capital has already gone beyond authoritarian hierarchy and work as a curse. "Autonomy" and "bottom-up" are the in words. The macho, muscle-bound, national (= white) worker image is giving way to a more open, multi-ethnic, male and female figure.

In 1900, you had to produce before consuming, and labour parties told the worker he had to develop the productive forces first, in order to enjoy the fruits of socialism later. Instead of a single Redeemer dying on a cross, millions of sufferers ("the salt of the earth") would create the conditions of a better world. The consumer and credit society has done away with that: painful self-exertion is no longer said to come before pleasure. True, this goes together with the multiplication of sweatshops, of forced, unpaid or ill-paid labour, and of a renaissance of slavery. Such forms complement but do not contradict the general trend toward a de-consecration of work. (In 1965, unskilled mass workers weren't the majority of wage-earners either.)

Work is an idol, albeit a fallen one. Its imposition is no longer of a moral or religious kind ("You shall gain your bread by the sweat of your brow"), but profane and down-to-earth. In some Asian countries, labour is now being disciplined better by the pressure of consumerism than by an appeal to Confucianism. In Tai-Peh as in Berlin, public concern is about creating and getting jobs, not suffering to enter some earthly or heavenly paradise. So work now calls for a critique different from the time when an aura of self-inflicted pain surrounded it. Mobility and self-empowerment are the present slogans of capital. We cannot be content with anti-work statements such as

the ones that the surrealists were *rightly* making eighty years ago.[25]

In 2002, work rules, but the work ethic is no longer sacrificial: it calls upon us to realise our potentials as human beings. Nowadays, we don't work for a transcendent goal (our salvation, a sacred duty, progress, a better future, etc.). The consecration of work was two-sided: any object of worship is a taboo to be broken. But our age is one of universal de-consecration. Transcendence is out. The pragmatic *pursuit of happiness* is today's motive: we are Americans.

This, however, does not lead to a growing subterranean rejection of work. A de-Christianized society substitutes the desire to feel good for the fear of sin. Religion gives way to a body and health cult: the "me generation" is more concerned with keeping fit than saving souls. So work is no longer worshipped because it does not need to be: it's enough for it to simply be there. It's more an overwhelming reality than an ideology. Its pressure is more direct and open, close to what Marx described as the American attitude: "total indifference to the specific content of work and easily moving from one job to another".[26] In a modern and "purer" capitalism, de-consecrated work still structures our lives and minds. And the current moral backlash in the *US* is proof of how reactionary attitudes complement permissiveness.

Not much revolutionary clarification has grown out of these changes, because not everything has the same value in capitalist evolution. The critical potential completely differs if it's the workers that attack worker identity and the worship of work, or if capital is sweeping them aside. For the last

[25] The cover of the 4th issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1925) proclaimed: "*and war on work*". See also Breton's article "The Last Strike" in no. 2 (1925), and Aragon's *Cahier Noir* (1926).

[26] *Results of the Immediate Process of Production* (*MECW 34*), pp. 419–424.... See also the *General Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1857 (*MECW 28*), p. 41.

relation supersedes the related dualisms of objectivism/ subjectivism and spontaneism/ voluntarism which characterised most Marxist theory in the 20th Century and indeed up to the present. The dynamism and changing character of this relation is thus grasped as a unified process and not simply in terms of waves of proletarian offensive and capitalist counter-offensive.

According to TC, it is the qualitative transformations within the capitalist class relation that determine the revolutionary horizon of the current cycle of struggle as communisation. For us, it is also true at a more general level of abstraction that the contradictory relation between capital and proletariat has *always* pointed beyond itself, to the extent that — from its very origins — it has produced its own overcoming as the immanent horizon of actual struggles. This horizon, however, is inextricable from the real, historical forms that the moving contradiction takes. It is thus only in this qualified sense that we can talk of communism transhistorically (i.e. throughout the history of the capitalist mode of production). As we see it, the communist movement, understood not as a particularisation of the totality — neither as a movement of communists nor of the class — but rather as the totality itself, is both transhistorical and variant according to the historically specific configurations of the capitalist class relation. What determines the communist movement — the communist revolution — to take the specific form of communisation in the current cycle is the very dialectic of integration of the circuits of reproduction of capital and labour-power.[6] It is this which produces the radical negativity of the proletariat's self-relation vis-à-vis capital. In this period, in throwing off its "radical chains" the proletariat does not generalise its condition to the whole of society, but dissolves its own being immediately through the abolition of capitalist social relations.

[6] We will explore these issues further in the next issue of *Endnotes*.

fully integrated within the circuit of capital, becomes external to itself. What defines the current cycle of struggle in contradistinction to the previous one is the character of the proletariat's *self-relation* which is now immediately its relation to capital. As TC put it, in the current cycle the proletariat's own class belonging is objectified against it as exterior constraint, as capital.[4]

This fundamental transformation in the character of the class relation, which produces this inversion in the proletariat's self-relation as pole of the relation of exploitation, alters the character of class struggles, and causes the proletariat to call into question its own existence as class of the capitalist mode of production. Thus for TC the revolution as communisation is an historically specific production: it is the horizon of *this* cycle of struggle.[5]

A produced overcoming

For TC, the relation between capital and proletariat is not one between two separate subjects, but one of *reciprocal implication* in which both poles of the relation are constituted as moments of a self-differentiating totality. It is this totality itself — this moving contradiction — which produces its own supersession in the revolutionary action of the proletariat against its own class-being, against capital. This immanent, dialectical conception of the historical course of the capitalist class

[4] This fundamental negativity in the proletariat's self-relation vis-a-vis capital is expressed by TC's use of the term *écart*, which may be translated as "divergence", "swerve" or "gap". For TC this concept expresses the idea that the proletariat's action as a class is the limit of this cycle of struggle; for its struggles have no other horizon apart from its own reproduction as a class, yet it is incapable of affirming this as such.

[5] For a discussion of this problematic in relation to concrete struggles, see TC's 'Self-organization is the first act of the revolution; it then becomes an obstacle which the revolution has to overcome.' Available on libcom.org.

thirty years, as work identification was being disrupted, the possibility of an utterly different world has also vanished from individual and collective thinking. In the past, Stalinist and bureaucratic shackles did not prevent such a utopia, and minorities debated the content of communism. If a working class entangled in its identification with work did not make a revolution, nothing yet proves that the proletarians now liberated from it will act in a revolutionary way.

"We Are Not of This World" (Babeuf, 1795)

We find it hard to share the optimism of those who see the present period as entirely dissimilar from the 60s-70s or from any previous period, with a capitalism that would systematically downgrade the living conditions of wage-earners, thereby creating a situation that would soon enough be intolerable and lead to a revolutionary crisis. The limits of proletarian upsurges from Algeria to Argentina, and the rise of radical reformism in Europe and the *US*, rather suggest that it's reform — not revolution — that is becoming topical again.[27]

The eagerness to celebrate the twilight of worker identity has led some comrades to forget that this identity also expressed an understanding of the irreconcilable antagonism between labour and capital. The proletarians had at least grasped that they lived in a world that was not theirs and could never be. We're not calling for a return to a Golden Age. We're saying that the disappearance of this identification owes as much to counter-revolution as to radical critique. Revolution will only be possible when the proletarians act as if they were strangers to this world, its outsiders, and will

[27] On the difficulty for capital to fully achieve a new (post-Fordist) system of production, and the consequences of this situation for the proletarians, see our 2nd Newsletter in English, *Whither the World?*, 2002.

relate to a universal dimension, that of a classless society, of a human community.

This implies the social subjectivity indispensable to any real critique. We are well aware of the interrogations raised by the word *subjectivity*, and we surely do not wish to invent a new magical recipe. For the moment, let us just say that we're not bestowing any privilege on subjectivity against objective conditions which would then be secondary or negligible.

We've often emphasised that there's no point in trying to arouse a consciousness *prior to* action: but any real breakthrough implies some minimal belief in the ability of the people involved to change the world. This is a big difference with the 60s-70s. Thirty years ago, many proletarians were not just dissatisfied with this society: they thought of themselves as agents of historical change, and acted accordingly, or at least tried to.

The subject/object couple is one of those philosophical expressions that a human community would supersede. The declared definitive opposition between individual and society, soul and body, spirit and matter, theory and praxis, art and economy, ideals and reality, morals and politics… all relate to the dissolution of communities into classes through the combined action of property, money and State power. Though not synonymous with perfect harmony, communism would try and live beyond such tragic splits in human life.[28] "Subject" and "object" don't exist separate from each other. A crisis is not something exterior to us, that happens and forces us to

[28] Rigorous Marxists often dismiss notions like "subjectivity", "mankind", "freedom", "aspiration"… because of their association with idealism and psychology. Strangely enough, the same rigor does not apply to set of concepts borrowed from economics, philosophy or sociology. (Primitivists would prefer anthropology.) All those vocabularies (and the visions of the world they convey) belong to specialised fields of knowledge, all of them inadequate for human emancipation, and therefore to be superseded. Until then, we have to compose a "unitary" critique from them and against them.

term the second phase of real subsumption, characterised by the capitalist restructuring or *counter-revolution* from 1974–95 which fundamentally alters the character of the relation between capital and proletariat. Gone now are all the constraints to accumulation — all impediments to the fluidity and international mobility of capital — represented by rigidities of national labour-markets, welfare, the division of the world economy into Cold War blocs and the protected national development these allowed on the "periphery" of the world economy.

The crisis of the social compact based on the Fordist productive model and the Keynesian Welfare State issues in financialisation, the dismantling and relocation of industrial production, the breaking of workers' power, de-regulation, the ending of collective bargaining, privatisation, the move to temporary, flexibilised labour and the proliferation of new service industries. The global capitalist restructuring — the formation of an increasingly unified global labour market, the implementation of neo-liberal policies, the liberalisation of markets, and international downward pressure on wages and conditions — represents a counter-revolution whose result is that capital and the proletariat now confront each other directly on a global scale. The circuits of reproduction of capital and labour-power — circuits through which the class relation itself is reproduced — are now fully integrated: these circuits are now immediately internally related. The contradiction between capital and proletariat is now displaced to the level of their reproduction as classes; from this moment on, what is at stake is the reproduction of the class relation itself.

With the restructuring of capital (which is the dissolution of all the mediations in the class relation) arises the impossibility of the proletariat to relate to itself positively against capital: the impossibility of proletarian autonomy. From being a positive pole of the relation as interlocutor with, or antagonist to, the capitalist class, the proletariat is transformed into a negative pole. Its very being qua proletariat, whose reproduction is

tion is one which is becoming internal, but mediated through the state, the division of the world economy into national areas and Eastern or Western zones of accumulation (each with their accompanying models of "third world" development), collective bargaining within the framework of the national labour-market and the Fordist deals linking productivity and wage increases

The positivity of the proletarian pole within the class relation during the phase of formal subsumption and the first phase of real subsumption is expressed in what TC term the "programmatism" of the workers' movement, whose organisations, parties and trade unions (whether social democratic or communist, anarchist or syndicalist) represented the rising power of the proletariat and upheld the programme of the liberation of labour and the self-affirmation of the working class. The character of the class relation in the period of the programmatic workers' movement thus determines the communist revolution in this cycle of struggle as the self-affirmation of one pole within the capital-labour relation. As such the communist revolution does not do away with the relation itself, but merely alters its terms, and hence carries within it the counter-revolution in the shape of workers' management of the economy and the continued accumulation of capital. Decentralised management of production through factory councils on the one hand and central-planning by the workers' state on the other are two sides of the same coin, two forms of the same content: workers' power as both revolution and counter-revolution.

For TC this cycle of struggle is brought to a close by the movements of 1968–73, which mark the obsolescence of the programme of the liberation of labour and the self-affirmation of the proletariat; the capitalist restructuring in the aftermath of these struggles and the crisis in the relation between capital and proletariat sweeps away or hollows out the institutions of the old workers' movement. The conflicts of 1968–73 thus usher in a new cycle of accumulation and struggle, which TC

react. Historical situations (and opportunities) are also made of beliefs and initiatives, of our actions — or inaction.

Vaneigem's "radical subjectivity"[29] had its qualities (and its purpose at the time) and one major weakness: it appealed to the free will, to the self-awareness of an *individual* rising against his social role and conditioning. This is clearly not what we suggest. Capitalism is not based on necessity, and communism (or a communist revolution) on liberty. The abolition of their condition by the proletarians cannot be separated from concrete struggles against capital. And capital exists through social groups and institutions. Objective realities, notably the succession of "systems of production" rooted in and dependent on the class struggle, are the inevitable framework of the communist movement. What we do and will do with it remains to be seen.

[29] *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967).

Much Ado About Nothing

The subject which Dauvé and Nesic seek to reflect upon in this text is nothing less than the "historical failure" of the communist movement over the 154 years following the publication of Marx and Engels' *Manifesto*.[1] They approach this subject by way of a critique of the concept of *programmatism* developed primarily by the journal *Théorie Communiste*. However, programmatism could only serve as an explanation of the "failure of the communist movement" if we imagine, as Dauvé and Nesic do, that communism is a norm, a substance, something invariable in "its deep content".[2] For without this assumption programmatism is only the explanation of its own failure. We will thus begin by explicating the theory of programmatism which Dauvé and Nesic have so misunderstood. But it should be noted that what is actually at stake here is the definition of the present period and, even more, the fact that a "present period" may even exist. That is ultimately to say, something called history.

[1] Gilles Dauvé & Karl Nesic, 'Love of Labour? Love of Labour Lost…' p. 107 (all page references are to Dauvé and Nesic's texts in the published version of Endnotes #1 unless otherwise noted, the PDF of Endnotes #1 is available here).

[2] p. 134

process of capital. Yet it is through their questionable theoretical deployment of the categories of subsumption that TC are able to advance a new conception of the historical development of the class relation. *Within this periodisation the degree of integration of the circuits of reproduction of capital and labour-power is of decisive importance.* The key to the historical periodisation of the class relation is the extent to which the reproduction of labour-power, and hence of the proletariat as class, is integrated with the circuit of self-presupposition of capital.[3]

TC's "period of formal subsumption" is characterised by an un-mediated, external relation between capital and proletariat: the reproduction of the working-class is not fully integrated into the cycle of valorisation of capital. In this period, the proletariat constitutes a positive pole of the relation, and is able to assert its autonomy vis-à-vis capital at the same time as it finds itself empowered by capitalist development. However the rising power of the class within capitalist society and its autonomous affirmation steadily come into contradiction with each other. In the crushing of workers' autonomy in the revolutions and counter-revolutions at the end of the First World War this contradiction is resolved in an empowerment of the class which reveals itself as nothing more than capitalist development itself. This qualitative shift in the class relation marks the end of the transition from the period of formal subsumption to the first phase of real subsumption. From this point on the reproduction of labour-power becomes fully integrated, albeit in a heavily mediated fashion, into the capitalist economy, and the process of production is transformed in accordance with the requirements of the valorisation of capital. The relation between capital and proletariat in this phase of subsump-

[3] By "self-presupposition of capital" TC mean the sense in which capital establishes itself both as condition and result of its own process. This is expressed in TC's use (following the French edition of Capital) of the term *double*

moulinet, signifying two intersecting cycles.

labour in the immediate production process, in which formal subsumption would be paired with the extraction of absolute surplus value (through the lengthening of the working day) and real subsumption with the extraction of relative surplus value (through increasing productivity by the introduction of new production techniques, allowing workers to reproduce the value of their wages in less time thus performing more surplus labour in a working day of a given length). In TC's conception, the character and extent or degree of subsumption of labour under capital is also, and perhaps fundamentally, determined by the way in which the two poles of the capital-labour relation, i.e. capital and proletariat, relate to each other as classes of capitalist society. Thus for TC, the key to the history of capital is the changing mode of *reproduction* of capitalist social relations as a whole according to the dialectical development of the relation between classes. Of course this development is itself intrinsically bound up with the exigencies of surplus-value extraction. In short, for TC the subsumption of labour under capital mediates, and is mediated by the specific historical character of the class relation at the level of society as a whole.

There is something problematic both in the way TC use the concept of subsumption to periodise capitalism, and in the way this usage partially obscures one of the most significant aspects of the development of the class relation which their theory otherwise brings into focus. Strictly speaking, formal and real subsumption of labour under capital only apply to the immediate process of production. In what sense, for example, can anything beyond the labour-process ever be said to be actually *subsumed* by capital rather than merely dominated or transformed by it?[2] TC, however, attempt to theorise under the rubric of these categories of subsumption the character of the capitalist class relation *per se* rather than simply the mode in which the labour-process actually *becomes* the valorisation-

[2] We will explore these issues further in the next issue of *Endnotes*.

1 The theory of programmatism

i The emancipation of labour and its failure

Generally speaking we could say that programmatism is defined as a theory and practice of class struggle in which the proletariat finds, in its drive toward liberation, the fundamental elements of a future social organisation which become the *programme to be realised.* This revolution is thus the affirmation of the proletariat, whether as a dictatorship of the proletariat, workers' councils, the liberation of work, a period of transition, the withering of the state, generalised self-management, or a "society of associated producers". Programmatism is not simply a theory — it is above all the practice of the proletariat, in which the rising strength of the class (in unions and parliaments, organisationally, in terms of the relations of social forces or of a certain level of consciousness regarding "the lessons of history") is positively conceived of as a stepping-stone toward revolution and communism. Programmatism is intrinsically linked to the contradiction between the proletariat and capital as it is constituted by the formal subsumption of labour under capital.

At this point capital, in its relation to labour, poses itself as an external force. For the proletariat, to liberate itself from capitalist domination is to turn labour into the basis of social relations between all individuals, to liberate productive labour, take up the means of production, and abolish the anarchy of capitalism and private property. The proletariat's liberation is to be founded in a mode of production based upon abstract labour, i.e. upon value.

The revolutionary process of the affirmation of the class is two-fold. It is on the one hand conceived of as the rising strength of the proletariat in the capitalist mode of production and, on the other hand, its affirmation as a particular class and thus the preservation of its autonomy. In the necessity of its

own mediations (parties, unions, cooperatives, societies, parliaments), the revolution as autonomous affirmation of the class (as a particular existence for itself in relation to capital) loses its way, not so much in relation to revolution per se, but in relation to this very affirmation. The proletariat's rising strength is confused with the development of capital, and comes to contradict that which was nevertheless its own specific purpose: its autonomous affirmation.

In the revolutionary period after World War I, of which the Communist Lefts in their practice and theory are the substantial expression, the proletariat finds itself ambushed by a novel situation: in its autonomous affirmation it confronts what it is in capital, what it has become, its own strength as a class *in so far as it is a class of the capitalist mode of production*. The revolution as affirmation of the class confronts *its own failure*, because the counter-revolution is intrinsically linked to this affirmation in its very motivations (and not because there was any "error", or because it was impossible in terms of some ahistorical definition of the revolution). From this point on, the workers' parties become the content of the counter-revolution closest to the revolution.

With the transition of capital to a period of real subsumption of labour (at the end of the 19th, and beginning of the 20th century), the rising strength of the class, in which labour presents itself as the essence of capital, is confused with the development of capital itself. All the organisations which formalise this rising strength, are able from the First World War onwards, to present themselves as the managers of capital — they become as such the most acute form of the counter-revolution.

In the years after 1917 revolution is still an affirmation of the class, and the proletariat seeks to liberate *against* capital its social strength which exists *in* capital — a social strength on which it bases its organisation and founds its revolutionary practice. The very situation which gave it the capacity to

struggle of the proletariat appears to be or is submerged at some points in history, only to re-emerge at other "high points" (e.g. 1848, 1871, 1917-21, 1936, 1968-9). On this view, we are currently experiencing a prolonged downturn in class struggle (at least in the advanced capitalist countries), and it is a case of waiting for the next re-emergence of the communist movement, or for the revolutionary proletariat to carry out its subversive work: "Well burrowed, old Mole!"[1]

Thus for Troploin, communism as communisation is an ever-present (if at times submerged) possibility, one which, even if there is no guarantee that it will be realised, is an invariant in the capitalist epoch. By contrast, for TC communisation is the specific form which the communist revolution must take in the current cycle of struggle. In distinction from Troploin, then, TC are able to self-reflexively ground their conception of communisation in an understanding of capitalist history as cycles of struggle.

Cycles of struggle and phases of accumulation

TC historicise the contradictory relation between capital and proletariat on the basis of a periodisation of the subsumption of labour under capital; this periodisation distinguishes cycles of struggle corresponding to the qualitative shifts in the relation of exploitation. This history for TC comprises three broadly identifiable periods: (1) formal subsumption — ending around 1900; (2) the first phase of real subsumption — from 1900 to the 1970s; (3) the second phase of real subsumption — from the 1970s to the present.

Importantly for TC, the subsumption of labour under capital is not merely a question of the technical organisation of

[1] Marx, *18th Brumaire*, (MECW 11), p.105.

Afterword

The debate between *Théorie Communiste* (TC) and *Troploin* (Dauvé & Nesic) that we have reproduced revolves around the fundamental question of how to theorise the history and actuality of class struggle and revolution in the capitalist epoch. As we have stressed in our introduction, both sides of the debate were products of the same political milieu in France in the aftermath of the events of 1968; both groups share, to this day, an understanding of the movement which abolishes capitalist social relations as a movement of communisation. According to this shared view, the transition to communism is not something that happens after the revolution. Rather, the revolution as communisation is itself the dissolution of capitalist social relations through communist measures taken by the proletariat, abolishing the enterprise form, the commodity form, exchange, money, wage labour and value, and destroying the state. Communisation, then, is the immediate production of communism: the self-abolition of the proletariat through its abolition of capital and state.

What sharply differentiates TC's position from that of Troploin, however, is the way in which the two groups theorise the production, or the *historical* production, of this movement of communisation. Neither grounds the possibility of successful communist revolution on an "objective" decadence of capitalism; however, Troploin's conception of the history of class struggle, in common with much of the wider ultra-left, is of a fluctuating antagonism between classes, an ebb and flow of class struggle, according to the contingencies of each historical conjuncture. In this wider conception, the revolutionary

engage in the broad affirmation underlying the "revolutionary élan" of the post-war period became its limit. The specificity of this period in relation to classical programmatism, represented by pre-1914 social democracy, resides in the fact that the autonomous affirmation of the class against capital entered into contradiction with its rising strength within capital. At the same time, this affirmation found its *raison d'être* and its foundation in this integration. *What the class is in the capitalist mode of production is the negation of its own autonomy, whilst at the same time being the reason and power behind its drive for autonomous affirmation.* The counter-revolutions are administered by the workers' organisations. The impetuous history between the wars, from the Russian revolution to the Spanish civil war, is that of the liquidation of this question.

The concept of programmatism historicises the terms of class struggle, revolution and communism. This enables us to understand class struggle and revolution in their real historical characteristics and not in relation to a norm; to overcome the opposition which is made between revolution, communism, and its conditions (those famous conditions which are never ripe); to abandon the dichotomy between a proletariat always revolutionary in its substance (revolutionary, in fact, as the subsequent period understands the term) and a revolution which it never produces; to construct the diverse elements of an epoch as a totality producing its own internal connections at the same time as its diversities and conflicts (between Marx and Bakunin, Luxembourg and Bernstein, etc.); and finally, to avoid ending up with a "revolutionary being" of the proletariat, whose every "manifestation" results in a restructuring of capital.

One can always search out evidence to the contrary in isolated actions and events which appear at first sight to oppose themselves to the general movement, and seek to detach such moments from the movement and consider them in isolation. In this way Dauvé and Nesic only show how the incompara-

bly larger part of the movement contradicts their affirmations. By failing to integrate these moments into a totality they limit themselves to opposing isolated activities to each other without grasping their unity.

With the real subsumption of labour under capital, the defining characteristic of which is the extraction of relative surplus value, that which disappears is everything which allowed the proletarian condition to be turned against capital — this is the decomposition of programmatism. From the 20s to the end of the 70s, this decomposition is not an exhaustion of the previous period, but a new structure and a new cycle of struggle. The basis of the decomposition of programmatism as an historical period is the existence of a workers' identity stabilised in the aftermath of the second world war: a workers' identity confirmed in the reproduction of capital — labour legitimised as the rival of capital within the capitalist mode of production. This workers' identity is founded on all the characteristics of the immediate process of production (i.e. assembly-line work, cooperation, the collective worker, the continuity of the process of production, sub-contracting, the segmentation of labour power) and all those of reproduction (work, unemployment, training and welfare). As such it is an identity founded on all the elements which make of the class a determination of the reproduction of capital itself (i.e. public services, the national delimitation of accumulation, creeping inflation and "the sharing of productivity gains"); all these elements which positioned the proletariat, socially and politically, as a national interlocutor formed a workers' identity which challenged the hegemonic control and management of the whole of society. This workers' identity which constituted *the workers' movement* and structured class struggle, even integrating "really existing socialism" within the global division of accumulation, rested on *the contradiction between, on the one hand, the creation and development of labour power put to work by capital in an increasingly collective*

> right one? Nothing can guarantee that in 2050, after 50 more years of capitalism, a even more broad-ranging overview won't establish for x + y reasons the ways in which the proletarians of the year 2000 … remained historically constrained by the limits of their times, and thus that communism wasn't actually in the offing in the year 2000 any more than it was in 1970 or 1919, but that now a new period is ushering itself in, allowing us to genuinely grasp the past from the new, proper viewpoint."[63]

The point of view is a good one because, today, it's the only one we have, *because it is ours*. We don't aspire to an eternal grasp of communism because such a thing doesn't exist. Of course we may be "constrained by our limits", but for as long as the combat continues these limits are what we are, our force which will perhaps become our undoing. We know that if, in the current cycle, the limit of the class activity of the proletariat is to act as a class, then nothing is determined in advance, and overcoming this contradiction will be arduous. But we also know that for us, now, communism is the abolition of all classes and that it is the overcoming of all previous limits of class struggle.

We don't believe in the unchanging being of the proletariat or in the invariant need of the human community since time immemorial. We think the *situation* in which we find ourselves: our cycle of struggle carries such a content and such a structure of the confrontation between capital and the proletariat, and for us it is the communist revolution, because for us it is rigorously impossible to envisage other forms and other contents.

[63] Dauvé, 'Human, All Too Human?' p. 93 above.

work".[62] We wouldn't say the class was ever "entangled", we would rather say *strengthened by its identification with work*. We don't share Dauvé and Nesic's normative view of the revolution. Until a recent period there was no revolution without this "identification with work" (or else there has never been a revolutionary movement). If the proletariat is defined through accumulation and acts accordingly, its failure is not interior to its practice; it lies in its relation to the counter-revolution. This practice is a determinant practice and not a communist practice inherently propelled towards an internal impossibility. This practice is directed at the community of labour, and it has really been rendered impossible in the class struggle through its relation to the counter-revolution.

If we say *today* that the revolutions were beaten on the basis of what they were, that their intimate relationship to the counter revolution was found within them (as certain left communist tendencies perceived), if we do not replay history supposing that the revolutions could have been anything else, we nonetheless don't say that they lacked anything, we don't attribute to them the consciousness which results precisely from their failures and counter-revolutions. The Russian proletarians of 1917, German of 1919, or Spanish of 1936, acted as such, they carried out the revolutionary movement which was theirs in all consciousness and all contradiction. The limits of their movement were imposed on them by the counter-revolution that they had to fight. What we can say *now* of these movements, we say now, and if we say why they failed we owe it to the combats as they were waged. *Our analysis is a result; the result doesn't pre-exist the thing*. Anyone is free to explain what was on the basis of what ought to have been, and to imagine the latter; that isn't our method.

> "What privilege permits the observer in the year 2000 to know that his standpoint is ultimately the

[62] p. 153

and social manner, and on the other, the (increasingly) limited forms of appropriation by capital of this labour power in the immediate process of production and reproduction.

This is the conflictual situation which developed as workers' identity — an identity which found its distinction and its immediate modalities of recognition (its confirmation) in the "large factory", in the dichotomy between employment and unemployment, work and training, in the submission of the labour process to the collectivity of workers, in the link between wages, growth and productivity on a national level, in the institutional representations that all this implied, as much in the factory as at the level of the state, and, last but not least, in the social and cultural legitimacy and pride in being a worker. There was a self-presupposition of capital, in accordance with the concept of capital, but the contradiction between the proletariat and capital couldn't situate itself at this level, in so far as within this self-presupposition there was a production and confirmation of a workers' identity through which the class struggle structured itself as the workers' movement.

The decomposition of programmatism contains the increasingly obvious impossibility of conceiving the revolution as a "growing-over"[3] of that which the proletariat is in capitalist society, of its rising power as a workers' movement. The process of revolution is practically and theoretically posed in terms of *class autonomy*, as so many ruptures with its integration, and of the defence of its reproduction. Self-organisation and autonomy *become* the revolution, to such an extent that the form suffices for the content.

[3] *TN*: *Transcroissance* — Trotsky used this term to describe the "growing over" from the bourgeois to the proletarian revolution. *TC* employ the term more generally, using it to signify the belief that class struggle is not a part of capitalism but a stage in the progressive liberation of the class; in particular the idea that struggles over the wage may become revolutionary through being generalised.

Self-organisation, strong unions and the workers' movement, all appeared in the same world of the revolution as affirmation of the class. The affirmation of the truly revolutionary being of the class which manifests itself in autonomy could not have the slightest basis in reality if it weren't for the good de-alienated side of this world which was experienced as a strong workers' movement "framing" the class. Self-organisation entails the self-organisation of struggle, thus the self-organisation of producers. In a word — liberated labour; in another word — value. This cycle of struggle culminated between the end of the 60s and the first half of the 70s. Practically and theoretically, autonomy was unleashed in every possible manner, from self-organised unions to insurrectionary autonomy. This world is now obsolete.

There is no restructuring of the capitalist mode of production without a workers' defeat. This defeat was that of workers' identity, of communist parties, of unionism; of self-management, self-organisation and autonomy. The restructuring is essentially counter-revolution. Through the defeat of a particular cycle of struggle — the one which opened in the aftermath of World War I — it is the whole programmatic cycle which reached its conclusion.

ii The overcoming of programmatism is not a critique of work

We have just briefly outlined the "thesis of programmatism." For Dauvé and Nesic this thesis is "false in regard to the facts, and even more so in regard to the method, the attitude in relation to the world to be transformed."[4] Nevertheless, Dauvé and Nesic have understood it neither in regard to the facts nor the "method." And as for the "attitude"…

[4] p. 108

Proletarian activity does not determine itself because it has no "direct link with capital," it determines itself because it is its relation to capital and nothing more *and this relation is a contradiction*. That can only be seen as determinism if one wants to define a subject prior to its relations in which alone it exists, which define it, and in which it acts. If we separate the subject and its action from its "frame" we can only conceive of their relation in the alternative of determinism and freedom.

iii "The cause of our failures"

Why the failure? In a certain way Dauvé and Nesic give an answer: the revolution failed because the proletariat failed to make the revolution. They never get beyond that tautology and they cannot. It is inevitable because to get beyond that tautology would be to determine the historical action of proletarians, it would be to establish a link between the development of capital and proletarian activity. The tautology is structural to their thought. If you mess with the tautology you mess with *freedom*.

Dauvé and Nesic can only accuse *TC* of "determinism" by supposing that *TC* shares their own fixed, normative and invariant conception of the revolution. It is obvious that in such a problematic the revolution cannot "result from a particular stage", for it is "invariant in its deep content".

For us, the revolution of which we speak today is, if you will, the *product* of the current situation; it is not *The* Revolution rendered at last possible by the current situation. In the problematic of Dauvé and Nesic *TC* is determinist, what Dauvé and Nesic haven't noticed is that *TC* abandoned that problematic thirty years ago. They critique *TC* as if *TC* was just giving another response to the same problematic.

After 18 pages intended to show that it never (and could never have) existed, Dauvé and Nesic allow the supposition that the working class was "entangled in its identification with

will only be possible when the proletarians act as if they were strangers to this world, its outsiders, and will relate to a universal dimension, that of a classless society, of a human community."[61] What does it mean to act as if one was outside? Note the circumlocutions of the formula. Already how to act "outside" is hardly obvious, but to act "*as if*" one was outside… The outside connects to the universal dimension: we are in total conceptual phantasmagoria. One of the most difficult things to understand is the nature of contradiction: that the capitalist social relation can be on the one hand totally ours and we can only be it, and, on the other, that we could in that very respect abolish it.

The abolition of the proletarian condition is the *self-transformation* of proletarians into immediately social individuals, it is the struggle against capital which will make us such, because this struggle is a relation that implies us with it. The production of communism is effectuated by a class which finds the content of communism in its own class situation, without having to attach itself to any "universal dimension". Communisation is carried out in the struggle of the proletariat against capital. Abolishing exchange, the division of labour, the structure of the corporation, the state…, are measures which are necessarily taken up in the course of struggle, with their retreats and their sudden stops they are just as much tactical measures through which communisation is constructed as the strategy of the revolution. It is thus, through the struggle of a class against capital, that the immediately social individual is produced. It is produced by the proletariat in the abolition of capital (the final relation between capital and the proletariat), and not by proletarians who will no longer be completely proletarians acting "as if they were outside". But then, protest the delicate souls, "we would be forced…"

[61] p. 154

The starting point for their refutation of the "thesis of programmatism" is a misunderstanding:

> "From the 1960s onwards, a more and more visible resistance to work, sometimes to the point of open rebellion, has led quite a few revolutionaries to revisit the past from the point of view of the acceptance or rejection of work."[5]
> "A real critique of work was impossible in the 60s … Now things are completely different."[6]

This observation is historically correct, but the misunderstanding resides in the fact that to understand the breakdown of programmatism as a crisis of work and its overcoming formulated as a "critique of work" is to remain within programmatism.

Given that the proletariat presented itself as a revolutionary class in the critique of all that which "articulates" it as a class of the capitalist mode of production, in the councilist and self-organisationalist vision the worm was already in the fruit. It popped its head out at the beginning of the 70s, with the ideology of self-negation of the proletariat and the critique of work. It was only by opposing itself to that which could define it as a class of the capitalist mode of production that the proletariat could be revolutionary. The "refusal of work", the riots, lootings and strikes without demands, naturally became the supreme activity on the basis of which self-negation could take place. All that was needed was to self-organise, set up The Councils whilst no longer remaining "labourers" and "workers": i.e. to square the circle.

Theoretical humanism allowed that which *appeared* as negation and refusal to be seen as overcoming. Dauvé and Nesic are examples of theoreticians blocked at this stage of

[5] p. 107
[6] p. 108

theoretical production, not only because they understand neither the restructuring nor the new cycle of struggle, but most importantly because they are waiting for such things to resurface — the resurrection of a schema which was already in its own day an ideology of the failure of a cycle of struggle coming to an end. Just as the relation between the rising strength of the class and its autonomous affirmation expresses, in its own terms, the failure of programmatism, this same relation, in the form of the relation between self-organisation and self-negation, expresses the impossibility of the revolution, in its own terms, in the cycle of the decomposition of programmatism. Communism is not principally the abolition of work, it is only such within a theoretical system founded on the analysis of labour, that is to say on the relation between man and nature as the starting point of communist theory. What matters in reality are the social relations which *determine* human activity as labour — the point is thus the abolition of these relations and not the abolition of work. The "critique of work" is not able to *positively* address the restructuring as a transformation of the contradictory relation between classes. It can only address it negatively in terms of the "liquidation" or de-essentialisation of work.

iii Beyond programmatism

For Dauvé and Nesic we are free of the "old workers' movement" based on the "consecration of work" and "workers' identity" etc., but this has resulted in no "revolutionary clarification" — in short we are no further down the road. It is obvious that "proletarian autonomy has not taken advantage of bureaucratic decline," for they both belong to the same world of workers' identity. Dauvé and Nesic attribute this liquidation exclusively to capital, as if the "struggles of '68" had no role to play. Trapped in their normative problematic of the revolution (in fact an ideological result of the failure of the previous

"Labour power overcoming its condition and rising to its historic task of freeing itself from its chains, and thus freeing humanity."[59] What an unfortunate and truly determinist formula. Doubly unfortunate, for not only does it take up that dominical determinism of the "old days" soapbox discourse, it indicates all the hidden discourse of Dauvé and Nesic — that of the liberation of labour. Labour power "freeing itself from its chains" is a contradiction in terms. It's true that it has already "overcome its condition", but this just renders everything more confused. If it "overcomes its condition" it is no longer labour-power, there is nothing left which can be called by that name.

The conclusion of Dauvé and Nesic's text is given the authoritative stamp of a quote from Babeuf: "we are not of this world." Sylvain Maréchal took the hospice as the model of communist organisation, Babeuf took the army. To call proletarians at the turn of the 19th century "men from nowhere" is to cast around phrases without consideration. We would recommend, on this subject, the reading of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, of which Gilles Dauvé was one of the translators, to understand all the historical, cultural and geographical rootedness which formed this class and on the basis of which it formed itself. Dauvé and Nesic do not conceive of the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production on the basis of the contemporary situation and practice of the working class in *this* mode of production, *within it*, as its contradictory process; they write: "the decline of workerism was accompanied by the loss of a point of view allowing a perspective on the whole of this society, gauging and judging it *from the outside* in order to conceive and propose another".[60]

After regretting not being able to "judge" and "gauge" society "from the outside" in order to propose another, they wait for the proletarians to act as if they were outside: "Revolution

[59] p. 145
[60] pp. 150-151

tradiction for the very thing for which it is the dynamic: the capitalist mode of production. It's in this sense that it is a contradiction which can lead to its own abolition. Capitalism is not only "based on those it enslaves", but it is also in the very nature of this enslavement that the capacity for the latter to become revolutionary resides. It is the object as totality — the capitalist mode of production — that is *in contradiction with itself in the contradiction of its elements*, because this contradiction with the other is for every element, to the extent that is its other, a contradiction with itself. The overcoming of the contradiction of exploitation is provided by its non-symmetrical aspect (subsumption of labour under capital). The situation of the proletariat is the self-contradiction of the reproduction of capital. *When we say that exploitation is a contradiction for itself we define the situation and revolutionary activity of the proletariat.*

Dauvé and Nesic expressly say:

> "The proletarian only starts acting as a revolutionary when he goes beyond the negative of his condition and begins to create something positive out of it, i.e. something that subverts the existing order. It's not for lack of a critique of work that the proletarians have not 'made the revolution', but because they stayed within a negative critique of work."[58]

We are still waiting for them to define "a positive critique of work." They avoid doing this because it would require them also to define this anthropological work which capital imperfectly subsumes to itself and which, in relation to the refusal of this subsumption, gives us the revolution. Dauvé and Nesic want the liberation of *true labour*. Such "living labour with universal grasp" only exists as such, that is, as *abstraction*, to the extent that capital nourishes it; it is nothing more that its relation to capital.

[58] p. 142

cycle) they see only the disappearance of the old and not the appearance of the new.

Today, the overcoming of revindicative struggles[7] as revolutionary struggle — i.e. as communisation — is *presaged* whenever, in these struggles, it is its own existence as a class that the proletariat confronts. This confrontation takes place within revindicative struggles and is first and foremost only a means of waging these struggles further, but this means of waging them further implicitly contains a conflict with that which defines the proletariat. This is the whole originality of this new cycle of struggle. Revindicative struggles have today a characteristic that would have been inconceivable thirty years ago.

The proletariat is confronted by its own determination as a class which becomes autonomous in relation to it, becomes alien to it. The objectifications in capital of the unity of the class have become palpable in the multiplication of collectives and the recurrence of discontinuous strikes (the strikes of spring 2003 in France, the strike of the English postmen). When it appears that autonomy and self-organisation are no longer the perspective of anything, as with the transport strike in Italy or that of the workers at FIAT Melfi, it is precisely there that the dynamic of this cycle is constituted and the overcoming of revindicative struggles is presaged through a tension within revindicative struggles themselves.

To put unemployment and precarity at the heart of the wage relation today; to define clandestinity (*TN*: undocumented, black-market work) as the general situation of labour power; to pose — as in the direct-action movement — the social immediacy of individuals as the already existing foundation of the opposition to capital, even if this opposition describes

[7] *TN*: *Luttes revendicatives* — from 'revindicate': to demand. *Luttes revendicatives* is a common French term meaning struggles over wages and conditions, or struggles over immediate demands (as opposed to insurrectionary or political struggles). We use the archaic 'revindicative' because there is no simple equivalent in English.

the whole limit of this movement; to lead suicidal struggles like those of Cellatex and others of Spring and Summer of 2000;[8] to refer class unity back to an objectivity constituted by capital, as in all the collectives and discontinuous strikes; to target all that defines us, all that we are, as in the riots in the French suburbs of 2005; to find in the extension of revindicative struggles the questioning of revindication itself, as in the struggles against the *CPE*; are contents, for all of these particular struggles, which determine the dynamic of this cycle *within and through* these struggles. The revolutionary dynamic of this cycle of struggle, which consists in the class producing and confronting in capital its own existence, that is to say putting itself in question as a class, appears in the majority of struggles today. This dynamic has its intrinsic limit in that which defines it as a dynamic: action as a class.

In Argentina, in the productive activities which were developed, principally within the *Piquetero* movement, something occurred which was at first glance disconcerting: autonomy appeared clearly for what it is — the management and reproduction by the working class of its situation in capital. The defenders of "revolutionary" autonomy would say that this is due to the fact that it didn't triumph, although its triumph is precisely there. But at the moment within productive activity when autonomy appeared as it is, everything on which autonomy and self-organisation are founded was upset: the proletariat cannot find in itself the capacity to create other inter-individual relations (we deliberately do not speak of social relations) without overturning and negating what it is in this society, that is to say without entering into contradiction with autonomy and its dynamic. In the way that these productive activities

[8] The struggle against capital, according to the advocates of self-organisation, becomes "suicidal", yet this never led them to question the "preservation of the tools of labour" which the proletariat was supposed to take over. They don't see what this suicide contains for the proletariat in its contradiction with capital: the evidence of its own disappearance.

misery and dictatorship," that intergrates us into the "destructive march of capital." We are not intergrated by the fetishism of commodities (which is different to that of capital, i.e. the autonomisation of the elements of production in their relation to profit) but by the very structure of the social relation which is our own, exploitation — a relation which has turned exchange into an immanent moment of the domination of living labour by objectified labour. The possibility of tearing away the "mystifying appearance of the transaction" is situated within the contradictions of exploitation, the abolition of exploitation is not dependent on the tearing of the veil. If we read Dauvé and Nesic closely it seems that the "social bond" is for them what authorises the reproduction of capital.[57] Everything is inverted and appears as if the actors of capitalist society imagine their belonging to society as an environment. The "social system" is based on those it enslaves because the fetishism of commodity exchange veils the social relation productive of capital. The point is to overcome "the economy as something obvious and inevitable."

The "social bond" is always the reproduction of the capitalist social relation, always the self-presupposition as result of the contradiction between the classes in the sense that capital is always the dominant pole, assuring and constraining reproduction. In reality capitalism is only "based on those it enslaves" to the extent that "those it enslaves" exist only in the "enslavement" which defines them. They won't get out of this slavery by tearing away a "veil", but only by abolishing this slavery, by abolishing themselves. This is only possible due to the contradictory process of this enslavement for capital itself. The contradiction between the proletariat and capital is a con-

[57] The term "social bond" or "social link" (*lien social*), is employed by Dauvé alongside others such as "adhesion" "cohesion" and "integration" to describe the means by which capital commands the allegiance of those it exploits. See e.g. Gilles Dauvé & Karl Nesic. *Whither The World* (*Troploin Newsletter* no. 2 2002) p. 13 and 28.

It is that which permits the "adherence" of the worker to his work, but simultaneously, combined this time with the "rejection" of this work, that which opens other social horizons.

As always, if we have a "revolutionary being" this means that something in this being is the seed of its overcoming. In the revolution, the evasion and critique of work must be combined with adherence in so far as the former is *also* anthropological.

Dauvé and Nesic have uncovered the "secret" and the "mystery" over which Marx slaved away all his life: the "integration" of the proletariat with the "triumphant and destructive march of capital".[54] Such "enslavement" and "integration" is supposed to be founded on the anthropological nature of work which is prevented from rejecting its enslavement by the fetishism of commodities which "veils the social relations producing capital".[55] For Dauvé and Nesic capital is not a relation or production which *defines* us, but something which makes us *adhere*. The social relation explains why we enter it, but then the whole problem is there: we no more enter a social relation than we adhere to it. Fetishism and its veil are necessary to a problematic for which the social definition of classes, or more trivially individuals, is a matter of adherence. However, it isn't as exchangers that proletarians and capitalists confront each other, but as poles of a social relation, as classes.

It is the relation of exploitation and its reproduction, the capital relation, which includes exchange, and not the other way around. It is because it is a relation of exploitation that, if we want to put it like that, "capitalism imposes daily in real life and impresses on our minds: the economy as something obvious and inevitable, the necessity of exchanging commodities, of buying and selling labour."[56] But then it's not a kind of blackmail, an imposition we must obey "…if we wish to avoid want,

[54] p. 141
[55] *ibid.*
[56] *ibid.*

were put into place — in the effective modalities of their realisation, in the conflicts between self-organised sectors — the determinations of the proletariat as a class of this society (property, exchange, division of labour) were effectively upset. Self-organisation was not superseded in Argentina, but the social struggles pointed beyond themselves to such a supersession; it is in this way that the revolution becomes credible as communisation. The generalisation of the movement was suspended, its continuation conditioned upon the ability of every fraction of the proletariat to overcome its own situation, that is to say the self-organisation of its situation.

To act as a class today means, on the one hand, to no longer have as a horizon anything other than capital and the categories of its reproduction, and on the other, for the same reason, to be in contradiction with one's own reproduction as a class, to put it into question. These are two faces of the same action as a class. This conflict, this divergence[9] in the action of the class (to reproduce itself as a class of this mode of production / to put itself into question) exists in the course of the majority of conflicts. To act as a class is the limit of the action of the proletariat as a class. This contradiction will be a practical question in need of resolution, a question much more difficult, risky and conflict laden than the limits of programmatism.

Revolutionary activity is the rupture and overcoming that Dauvé and Nesic are looking for, but a *produced* rupture and overcoming — it has nothing to do with the immediate and above all presuppositionless transformation of the "*pater familias*" into a "revolutionary romanticist."[10]

The alliance between the autonomy of the proletariat and the negation of classes, the worker and man, which is an emergent ideology from a particular historical situation (that

[9] *écart* — could also be translated as "swerve" or "gap". See note 5 to the Afterword for an explanation of this concept.
[10] p. 147

of May ’68 and its failure) has been presented by Dauvé and Nesic as the invariant substance of a “tension” within the proletariat “between the submission to work and the critique of work.”[11] Their essentialist and invariant problematic of the proletariat and communism prevents them from having a historical conception of revolution and communism. The concept of programmatism is the basis of such a conception — a conception that they declare “false in regard to the facts, and even more so in regard to the method”.

2 “false in regard to the facts”

Dauvé and Nesic make seven objections to the concept of programmatism:

i The workers did not support “a utopia where labour would be king” for “otherwise, how do we account for the frequent demand to work less?”[12]

The workers couldn’t have had the liberation of labour as their perspective because they didn’t want to work more for the boss. The argument is simply dumbfounding. Dauvé and Nesic don’t understand the “affirmation of labour” as the “liberation of labour”, that is to say the abolition of its situation of subordination. The “liberation of labour” is precisely the reverse of wanting to work more (for less money) for the boss. It is precisely not to consider wage labour as a positive reality, but as that which is to be abolished. This objection wouldn’t be worth citing if we didn’t find it repeated in inverted form in the ideology of the “social bond” or “adhesion” which is supposed to be one of the terms of the “tension” within the being of the proletariat.

[11] p. 134
[12] p. 109

ing as something which doesn’t form part of it, something accidental. Contrary to the Marx of 1843-46, if we can and must speak of revolution today as the abolition of work (and all the rest) we do it on the basis of the internal contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, of exploitation, of the situation of the proletariat, without any reference to the “person” of the proletariat, to a “human essence”, to “man as community”. We are in contradiction with capital on the basis of what we are, that is to say of what capital is, and not from what we could be, a potential which would somehow already exist as suffering. It is the breakdown of programmatism which, at the end of the sixties and beginning of the seventies, momentarily resurrected the very conditions of its emergence as if they could also be those of its overcoming. We momentarily all became Feuerbachians again, …some of us remained so. They have thus made of an ideology born of the failure of ’68, the eternal formula of the communist revolution.

ii The “being” of the proletariat

The question of the “being” of the proletariat was raised and criticised at the beginning of the previous section. Here we consider more closely the central role given to labour in the “tension” within this “being”.

“The tension between the submission to work and the critique of work has been active since the dawn of capitalism”. There we have it: the “being” of the proletariat. On the one side: the “adherence” and “investment” which come with the wage relation, yet also the famous “anthropological dimension” of work;[53] but the first wouldn’t be able to function without the second, the other side: the desire for “evasion” and “critique” of work. But can one oppose an “anthropological dimension”? No. In the “tension” defined by Dauvé and Nesic the “anthropological dimension” effectively possesses the status of a mediation.

[53] p. 135

the proletariat, the quintessence of Communism, and a theory of the proletariat as class of the capitalist mode of production destined to defend its interests within it, a theory of the defence of the wage. It marks a passage from a *philosophy* of the proletariat, the revolution and communism, to a *theory* of the proletariat, the revolution and communism. This latter is not our own, *but the former still less so.* In this philosophical communism, under the same words, the concepts are absolutely different from our own, are inscribed in a completely different problematic. It is illusory to try to use some formulas as if they could be applied to class struggle as it exists today.

The revolutionary humanism of the "young" Marx, which he shares with all the theoreticians of the epoch, amounts, in the period which comes to a close in 1848, to the belief that capitalism and the domination of the bourgeoisie is only an *ephemeral* state (Marx broke from this position before '48). The proletariat is only a class of transition, an unstable social form resulting from the decomposition of society.

From the moment the contradiction was posed, its overcoming was supposed to be imminent. What escaped Marx and Engels at that early point was that capital could be the *development* of the contradictions which give rise to it, that they could be its *raison d'être*, that which nourishes it, that they could be the principle of its accumulation. They didn't see development as part of the contradiction, it was only anecdotal in relation to it, and could well not be from the moment that The Contradiction *is*. But it is thus the contradiction itself which is purely formal because its development is unnecessary.

We could treat the history of capital as unimportant because in 1845 (or 1867) and in 2007 it is identical in itself, and conclude that what was said of communism at its beginning is fixed in stone. But those who believe that the history of capital is without importance in the sense that, from the beginning, it is as it is in itself, have not yet managed to become Hegelian. Parmenides suffices. They leave the development alongside be-

ii The "liberation of labour" is the product of the organisations of the workers' movement and not of the workers themselves

This is passing a little rapidly over the fact that the workers themselves had founded these organisations and adhered to them in sometimes massive numbers. Besides, it was indeed the workers who, even if to defend their existence as workers (but how else could it be when one sets up *workers'* councils?), created councils, soviets, occasionally experimented with self-management, took control of factories, participated in factory committees, set up cooperatives and founded organisations, parties and unions which had the dictatorship of the proletariat and the liberation of labour as their programme. If we say that the liberation of labour is the theory of the organisations and not the working class, first it is false, but even if it were true it would be necessary to explain the relation between the two.

The history of the Commune is supposed to show that all of the aforementioned rigmarole didn't actually interest the workers. In his preface to *Bilan*, Dauvé says that during the Commune the communists, "being few in number," were "cautious".[13] But it is the content of their programme that explains these "cautions": the presentation of the affirmation of labour as "the final end of the movement" which must integrate "a long historical process";[14] the fact that in their own programme the communists recognised the historical necessity of those (the bourgeois republicans) who were about to eliminate them. There was a lot to be "cautious" about.

[13] Jean Barrot (Gilles Dauvé) *Fascism/Anti-fascism* (Black Cat Press 1982). This text is a partial translation of Dauvé's preface to *Bilan: Contre-révolution en Espagne 1936–1939* (10/18 1979), which was also the basis for *When Insurrections Die.*

[14] Marx. *The Civil War in France.* (*MECW 22*), p. 504.

The re-appropriation of production by the workers was in reality such a small priority for the Commune that its central committee announced as early as 21st of March 1871 (between the 18th and the 26th, thus before the re-appropriation by the republicans) in its *Journal official*: "The workmen, who produce everything and enjoy nothing, who suffer from misery in the midst of their accumulated products, the fruit of their work and their sweat… *shall they never be allowed to work for their emancipation*?"[15] Commenting on this citation Marx writes: "it is proclaimed as a war of labour upon the monopolists of the means of labour, upon capital;"[16] and a little bit further, "what the Commune wants is the social property which makes property the attribute of labour."[17]

Leaving aside these overt calls for re-appropriation, the number of enterprises and workshops taken over by the workers is far from being insignificant, nor was the system the Commune employed of handing out contracts to the most "socially progressive" bid. In the end it is the nature of the struggle for the liberation of work that explains the small number of measures of the kind Dauvé and Nesic are looking for. This struggle of the working class is moulded by all the historical mediations of capitalist development. Marx attacks the "patronizing friends of the working class" who congratulate themselves that "after all, workmen are rational men and whenever in power always resolutely turn their back upon socialist enterprises! They do in fact neither try to establish in Paris a *phalanstère* nor an *Icarie*".[18] In a word, those who seek the immediate realisation of the liberation of labour which is, for Marx, merely "a tendency" in the measures taken by the Commune, remain at the stage of utopian socialism and have not understood that these objectives have now become real

[15] Cited by Marx in Draft of *The Civil War in France* (*MECW 22*), p. 500.
[16] *ibid.* p. 501
[17] *ibid.* p. 505.
[18] *ibid.* p. 499.

isation of productive life; the contradiction in the life of the individual between its existence as a person and its existence as a member of a class. This second theme can be seen as derived from the first. Potentially universal, labour can no longer be a "means".

Those who think that Marx and Engels, between 1843 and 1846, with the abolition of labour and the other abolitions, grasped what we are now able to conceive of communist revolution don't realise that it is the very fact of conceiving the revolution as *abolition of labour* which distinguished their vision from ours. The abolition of labour, for Marx and *many others*, was *the emancipation of the proletariat* not, of course, as an affirmation of labour, but as a movement of the affirmation of a class which, because in the old world it is "rid of the old world"[51], represents the movement which abolishes existing conditions: communism. But since simultaneously, as action, communism exists as the definition of a class of this society, it follows that it is its independent organisation, its reinforcement and its pursuit of its own ends, the defence of its interests in this society which becomes identified with communism itself. Less than a year after *The German Ideology*, the abolition of labour explicitly becomes the "liberation of labour"[52], because the "abolition of labour" was *the emancipation of the proletariat* and the emancipation of the proletariat was its actual existence as action in the present society. At the moment when the old theory became coherent and concrete it flies into pieces.

The years 46-47 do not mark the passage between two *theories* of communism or revolution: a "radical" theory which, from the moment of its entry on the historical stage, is supposed to have announced, thanks to a particular situation of

[51] Marx, *The German Ideology* (*MECW 5*), p. 73.
[52] The text to which *TC* refer, Engels' *Principles of Communism*, an early draft of the *Communist Manifesto*, has in its English translation the "liberation of the proletariat" rather than "labour" (*MECW 6*), p. 341.

self as Community, Species Being, Man. Stirner was right to say that Man had replaced God and that it is the worst of all religions.

Man externalises his own powers, he objectifies them. It was thus necessary to rediscover the anthropological nature of religion in order to abolish it. Of course what was found there was the *mechanism* of every alienation, abolition, and overcoming for philosophical communism, including the abolition of labour which, in becoming "self-manifestation", was intended to reconcile the essence of the proletariat as a person with his immediate being. The abolition of money, of the state, followed the same logical mechanism. The Feuerbachian critical apparatus was generalised. The result of the abolition/overcoming is merely the *true* form of the essence of man. There is only a historical development and contradiction as an inverted form of the true community, which is already the truth of this inverted form. Alienation is merely its own becoming for itself.

"Labour is man's coming to be for himself within alienation or as an alienated man."[50] Alienated labour or alienation of the essence of man are thus only moments of the identity in-itself of labour and its objects, of man and his externalised forces, in the process of becoming an identity for-itself. The loss is only a form of the identity, its necessary becoming in order to rediscover itself (here lies all the limits of the concept of alienation). Against all the analysis of *Capital* or the *Grundrisse* in which we rediscover these expressions of the alienation of labour or its product, here the point of departure is not a social relation, but a subject (man) which divides itself in its identity with itself. It's in this sense that labour is destined to be *abolished*, because labour exists here only to produce its abolition.

In *The German Ideology* the abolition of labour is deduced from two themes: the virtual universality of the proletariat in relation to the history of the division of labour as universal-

[50] Marx, *1844 Manuscripts* (*MECW 3*), p. 333.

through their submission to the "historical conditions of the movement."[19]

Although "the working class did not expect miracles from the Commune,"[20] this working class knew that to "work out their own emancipation" they would have to "pass through long struggles," a "series of historic processes," in order for them to be recognised as "the only class capable of social initiative"[21]— and recognised as such by the middle class, which was supposed to line up, with the Commune, on the side of the workers.

The "hesitant" and timid character of these measures has also another root. Toward the end of March, within the Commune, the workers were beaten in their own camp. If Marx doesn't speak of the social significance of the transformation of the Commune's organs of management, and if he pretends that the Commune is exclusively a workers' government ("the finally achieved form of the dictatorship of the proletariat") it is because, for him, the revolution is not where we, today, look for it — that is to say in the independence of proletarian action and in its capacity to abolish itself in abolishing the capitalist mode of production — but in the capacity of the proletariat to represent the whole of society and its future. Looked at closely, this other reason for "hesitancy" is not that different than the first. The historical development of working class practice implies its defeat as an autonomous class.

As with the Commune, the Russian Revolution of 1917 is supposed to confirm that "the proletarians hardly manifested any productive enthusiasm." And nevertheless in an earlier text by Dauvé we find:

> "…the movement of factory and workshop Committees saw a remarkable surge between February

[19] *ibid.*
[20] *ibid.* p. 335.
[21] *ibid.* p. 336.

> and October. These committees were most often created with the aim of obtaining the eight-hour day and wage increases. In April the provisional government recognized their right to represent the workers in their negotiations with bosses and the government, *but little by little the committees tried to influence the direction of the factories which they took over in several cases*."[22]
>
> "During this time [after October 1917, the Bolshevik leadership having inaugurated and structured workers' control in Russia 'in the interests of a planned direction for the national economy'] the Russian workers continued to animate the Committees which often tried to seize factories. As the January 1918 number of the *Voice of the Metal Workers* states: 'the working class, from its nature, must occupy the central place in production and especially its organisation…' But these efforts often lead to failure."[23]

Of course one can change one's opinion, but that's not on the issue here — rather than the opinion about them, it is the historical facts themselves that have changed: that which existed exists no more.

One can equally refer to more "classical" historians:

> "The natural consequence of the [February 1917] revolution was to exacerbate the economic struggles. In this context the factory committees became the veritable protagonists of the confrontation between Capital and Labour. They

[22] Jean Barrot / Gilles Dauvé, *Notes pour une analyse de la révolution russe* — 1967 — in *Communisme et question russe* (Tête de feuilles, 1972) pp.47-48. Emphasis added.

[23] *ibid.* p. 51

contingent, non-indispensable in relation to the nature of capital, but they were certainly not contingent for the previous period. It is in this way that the becoming appears predetermined as a march towards purity. This is the trap into which fall all the ideologues who, not being able to conceive of history beyond teleology, choose to suppress it.

What is more, the question as to the "ultimate" character of this cycle of struggle has no solution, for strictly speaking it cannot be posed *theoretically* (and it never has been, for any cycle of struggle). Does that mean that the revolution and communisation are now the only future? Again this is a question without meaning, without reality. The only inevitability is the class struggle though which we can only conceive of the revolution of *this* cycle of struggle, and not as a collapse of capital leaving a space open, but as an historically specific practice of the proletariat in the crisis of this period of capital. It is thus this practice which *renders* the capitalist mode of production irreproducible. The outcome of the struggle is never given beforehand. It is self-evident that revolution cannot be reduced to a sum of its conditions, because it is an overcoming and not a fulfilment. It is communisation which renders the contradiction between the proletariat and capital irreproducible.

In the last resort, the independence of communism "in its deep content" in relation to the development of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital has its ontological argument: that of the philosophical communism of 1843-46.

Philosophical communism, which invokes *Man* and *Species*, characterises the quasi totality of theoretical production in the first half of the 1840s. For the "Germans" its point of departure is the critique of religion. This critique, as Marx himself applied it, is *the matrix of the critique of all alienations* (as Marx affirms in the first sentence of the *Introduction* of 1843). It follows that man's rediscovery of his essence in the critique and abolition/overcoming of religion is, according to him, *the matrix of all abolitions* (money, work etc.): the return of the subject to it-

revolutionary proletarians') place, have understood nothing of what a social relation means. All this also implies the historicity of the content of communism. Communism is historical in that it is in relation with the immediate course of each cycle of struggle. *When we say that the revolution and communism can only be immediate communisation, that doesn't mean that communism has finally presented itself today as it always really was or as it always should have been.*

To all those who say that 1848, 1917, 1968 etc. ended up in a way that could have been averted, we have a right to demand that just for once they tell us what made them end up where they did other than by saying that they ended up where they did because they didn't end up where they could have. Could anything else have happened? We don't know and we don't care. The question is meaningless. That which didn't happen leaves the domain of thought to enter the domain of faith and madness. The ideology of the possible looks to the past and says "this could have been or not been", it consists in considering as contingent, on the basis of the subsequent period, that which was essential to the previous period. From this substitution is born the belief in the invariant as the substantial core which results from the movement.

If the restructuring of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital resolves to a large extent the contradictions and limits of programmatism (not without the participation of workers' struggles), it neither gets us closer to a purity of this contradiction, nor a purity of capital. What creates this illusion is the fact that the capitalist mode of production always restructures itself according to what it is, and overcomes the limits which had been its own (its own conditions of valorisation and reproduction in a given moment). The restructuring is a supersession which, though unforeseeable (constituted along the tempestuous flow of struggles), cannot infringe upon the nature of capital. Once the restructuring is accomplished, the previous characteristics of capital appear for the next period as

> regulated the unions from behind. … Moreover, their leaders [the unions], mostly Mensheviks, took care to avoid intervening directly in the domain of production. It was thus the factory committees which immediately took this up, without a thought to the limits to which they were assigned by law. The workers of many factories had started to interrogate the questions of administration and technical direction, even to the point of chasing bosses and engineers out of the factory. When the employer decided to leave the key under the door it was common to the find the factory committee taking over the management of the establishment. … By launching the slogan of 'workers' control', which constituted an essential aspect of their programme, the Bolsheviks fanned the flames of *the spontaneous movement which grew from the radicalisation of the working masses*. They thus encouraged — for tactical reasons which we will return to later — the libertarian and anarcho-syndicalist tendencies which appeared in the factory committees and which sought to establish a workers' power in each separate enterprise, without making use of a centralised direction or taking into account the whole economic reality, thus a singularly confused programme. While the Mensheviks and the union leaders foresaw a state control of production, conforming to the generally accepted socialist principles, the factory committees generally stood up for the direct seizure of the enterprise and the self-management of the factories."[24]

[24] Oskar Anweiler, *The Russian Soviets*. Translated from the French: *Les Soviets en Russie*, (Gallimard 1972), pp.157-158. Emphasis added.

> "Workers' committees rapidly formed in the factories and a decree for the provisional government of the 22nd April 1917 gave them a legal existence in recognising their right to represent the workers in relation to the employers and the government. Their first demands were for the 8 hour day and a wage rise. But these demands didn't delay in arriving at more or less organised attempts on the part of workers, at first sporadic, but soon more and more frequent, to intervene in the management and to take possession themselves of the factories … Nonetheless, that which no one foresaw, was that the seizure of the factories by the workers would be in the long term even less compatible with the establishment of a socialist order than the seizure of land by the peasants."[25]

The last phrase by Carr contains the solution to the next question.

iii During the rare occasions where a seizure of production took place under workers' control, the leaders of "workers'" organisations had a very hard time imposing discipline on workers who showed little productive enthusiasm.

The first thing would be to explain why such "occasions" existed. But let's let this pass and come to the objection itself. The emancipation of labour is here conceived as the measurement of value by labour time, the preservation of the notion of the product, and the framework of the enterprise and exchange. At those rare moments when an autonomous affirmation of the proletariat as liberation of labour arrives at its realisation

[25] E. H. Carr, *The Bolschevik Revolution.* Translated from the French: *La Révolution bolchévique*, vol.II (Ed. de Minuit 1969), p.66.

to capital? What would this development of capital be if not this relation? To demand that we search for the causes of "our failures" only in the "activity of proletarians" is to see the development of capital as a frame to which we attribute more or less effectivity, but always as a sum of conditions. Dauvé and Nesic have conserved all the fundamental separations of objectivism and determinism, their only "originality" is to have refused the causal link which unites the elements. This renders their production incoherent and eclectic, and their writing full of hesitation and oscillation (yes/but, it is such and such/but of course we know that nonetheless…). And yet it is we, for whom the "solution" is neither a presupposition nor ineffable, but a real historical production, and of the only history that exists, that of the capitalist mode of production, who are supposed to be *"determinists"*.

When we define exploitation as the contradiction between the proletariat and capital, we define that contradiction as a history. The stage of the cycle of accumulation is not an external condition of victories or defeats, a conjuncture. Accumulation is part of the definition of the proletariat and its contradiction with capital. The proletariat is defined in the totality of the moments of exploitation, in the sense that it implies its reproduction and produces the conditions of the latter. To define the proletariat in the three moments of exploitation (the coming together of labour power and capital and the buying and selling of labour power, the absorption of living labour by objectified labour in the immediate process of production where surplus value is formed, the transformation of surplus value into additional capital) is to understand that the development of capital is not the realisation or the condition of the class contradiction which opposes the proletariat to capital, it is the real history of this contradiction. The contradiction does not dress itself in different forms, because it is nothing other than these forms. Those who would take umbrage at that, assuming it means capital would be doing the work in our (the

"History does not prove any direct causal link between a degree of capitalist development, and specific proletarian behaviour."[48] The "Metropolitan Indians" of Bologna could have taken the Winter Palace, and the unemployed of the National Workshops could have set up workers' councils. Dauvé and Nesic have conserved the entire theoretical structure of determinism, but the key element has become impossible to maintain: the identification of the "development of capital" with "revolutionary activity", that is, the rising strength of the class in the capitalist mode of production. As a result, they find themselves with a class activity which floats in the void, condemned to self-determination, that is to say indetermination. Such a conclusion cannot be expressed as such; one thus needs determination, but not too much, "invariance" and the "historical moment". And above all lots of "freedom", because the development of capitalism has been paradoxically maintained in its objective density.

The development of capitalism is nothing more than the contradiction between the proletariat and capital; there is no "link", neither rigid, nor fluid, nor direct. In the end Dauvé and Nesic tinker between determinism and liberty, necessity and possibility, invariance and contingency, freedom with a little determinacy and determinism with a little freedom. One must allow the proletariat the "freedom" to rise to its "historic task".[49] What a strange freedom, and a strange critique of determinism, which can speak of an "historic task". In the end it is their own determinism that Dauvé and Nesic are seeking to exorcize.

To look for the cause of revolutions and their failures in the relation between the proletariat and capital as they existed, is that to do anything other than to look for them in the practice of proletarians? What would this practice be if not the relation

[48] p. 147
[49] p. 145

(necessarily under the control of organisations of the workers' movement), as in Russia, Italy and Spain, it immediately inverts itself into the only thing it can become: a new form of the mobilisation of labour under the constraint of value and thus of "maximum output" (as the *CNT* demanded of the workers of Barcelona in 1936) provoking *ipso facto*, though marginally, all the reactions of disengagement or workers' resistance (cf. Seidman, M., *Workers Against Work in Barcelona and Paris*).

According to Dauvé the Russian Revolution of 1917 showed two fundamentally related things: firstly the workers "did little to restart production"[26] and lacked productive enthusiasm, and secondly these workers found themselves "faced with new bosses," and responded "as they usually do, by individual and collective resistance, active and passive."[27] We have dealt with the first point, let's pass to the second. Why were the workers confronted with new bosses? Why was the revolution a failure? What is this "revolutionary dynamic" which, coexisting with the "crystallization of power" would define the Russian Revolution as a "contradictory process" which went through an involution?[28] In all the texts of Dauvé and Nesic there is never a response to these questions. To respond to them they would have to qualify their "revolutionary dynamic", specify it historically, along with its counter-revolution. Yet it is here that we discover the forbidden dimension of their theory. For it presupposes that though the development of capital can be historically specified, the revolution, just like the counter-revolution, must be as it is in itself for all eternity. This hiatus prevents them from arriving at any synthesis.

Dauvé and Nesic don't want to see the self-management and the seizure of the factories in the ascendant phase of the Russian Revolution (February to October 1917). They don't

[26] p. 113
[27] *ibid.*
[28] *ibid.*

completely deny the facts, but class them in the range of activities subject to *necessity* (i.e. poverty). In their conception, given that the revolution must — by definition — be free, that which arises from necessity cannot be revolutionary. Thus there was never any revolutionary emancipation of labour because everything that could be seen as close to it in fact depends on the sordid activity of necessity. "What would be the worth of a revolution into which we were pushed against our wills?" ask Dauvé and Nesic in an earlier text.[29] There is a "revolutionary élan"[30], a "revolutionary dynamic", but these must remain undefined: everything else is "necessity". To define them would be to see the essential relation between the revolution and the Bolshevik counter-revolution, it would be to define the failure of revolution in terms of its very nature as liberation of labour, in terms of the seizing of production by the "associated producers". In effect it would mean having to deal with that which is described by Anweiler, Carr or Voline; and even Dauvé and Nesic themselves…

These latter two report all the trouble that the Bolsheviks had in returning the factories to a state of order. In this way they contradict their previous assertion about the infrequency of workers seizing factories and taking over the management of production. The Bolshevik counter-revolution finds its source and flows naturally (which doesn't mean without confrontation) from the course of the workers' revolution. It is as Trotsky said "the seizure of power by the whole of the proletariat", and simultaneously "workers' control initiated in the interests of a planned regulation of the national economy" (*Decree on Workers' Control* of 14-27 November 1917). If revolution is the control and management of the factories, the

[29] "*que vaudrait une révolution où nous serions poussés quasi malgré nous*?" Gillles Dauvé & Karl Nesic, *Il va falloir attendre* (*Troploin Newsletter* no. 2 2002), p.4. *TN*: this passage was removed from the English version of this text — *Whither the World?*

[30] see note 18 to p. 87 above.

> but its deep content remains invariant in 1796 and in 2002."[46]

If there is a "being" of the proletariat, and moreover a being on which the "realization of communism" depends, the revolution is inevitable. No amount of theoretical tinkering around the "historical moment" as the conjunctural condition of the *becoming actual* of this "being" will change anything. The "being" will always find its way through contingency and circumstance. Communism "in its deep content" will remain invariant in 1796 and 2002. All that remains is to name that "deep content", and, in passing, indicate a little contingent dross due to the "historical moment" of 1796 or 2002. But how do we separate the dross from the "invariant"?

Contrary to what Dauvé and Nesic say, if this "being" is "not just a metaphysics" then it is *not* "independent of the forms taken by capitalist domination". How could its "being" be independent when the proletariat is only a class of the capitalist mode of production? The "being" is held to be independent of the forms taken by capitalist evolution, but apparently the "realization of communism" is "of course" dependent on the "historical moment". Here we are knee-deep in the metaphysical relation *par excellence*: that of the essence and its conditions, of the tendency and its realisation. Dauvé and Nesic are careful to avoid explaining the relation between this "being" and the "historical moment". It goes without saying, just like the spontaneous idealism with which we think unawares. It is a case of the ideology of the launch window. They believe themselves to have overcome determinism because, as Dauvé writes in *Human, all too Human*: "nothing guarantees that a communist movement will be able or want to take advantage of it, but the possibility is there."[47] A "possibility" which may or may not be actualised… in other words: objective conditions.

[46] p. 134

[47] Dauvé, 'Human, All Too Human?' p. 100 above.

1830 what it did in Bologna in 1977, that the insurgents of the Commune failed because they didn't do what the SI had said nonetheless had to be done, it is obvious that *TC* is wrong.

The principle "error" is necessarily accompanied by an accessory error. We are supposed to have looked to capital and its development to resolve our problems in our place. This is to assume that it is capital alone which suppressed workers' identity, the "old workers' movement", and, as a consequence, that which we call programmatism. As if the struggles at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies had nothing to do with it; as if the re-appropriation of the themes of workers' identity in the radical democratic movement and the practical critique of this radical democratism by the direct action movement are all for nothing. Even if we accepted that capital suppressed workers' identity, it could only be as a counter-revolution, that is to say against the preceding revolution and not as an objective tendency which would "give" us ready-made new "conditions", without us participating in their emergence.

We will develop all these questions around the three synthetic themes that Dauvé and Nesic expose: there is no direct link between proletarian action and the degree of the development of capital; the "being" of the proletariat; and the "reasons for past failures".

i There is no direct link between proletarian action and the degree of the development of capital

> "If the 'being' of the proletariat theorized by Marx is not just a metaphysics, its content is independent of the forms taken by capitalist domination. The tension between the submission to work and the critique of work has been active since the dawn of capitalism. Of course the realization of communism depends on the historical moment,

organisation of their relations, the circulation and exchange of the products of labour, it has nothing to oppose to the state, to value, to the plan and a renewed capitalist management, other than its rank and file soviet democracy — that is to say nothing, a pure form — or else resistance to the re-imposition of work.

Yet this is not without importance. The proletariat does not simply find itself once more in an ordinary capitalist enterprise. Its refusal of work is situated at the heart of programmatism. In its manifestation of what, on its own terms, is an internal contradiction and impossibility of the programmatic revolution, the refusal of re-imposed work anticipates that which will spell the death of programmatism at the end of the 1960s.

In the most general sense, in its internal contradiction and the practical process of its own impossibility, programmatism produces the terms of its overcoming. It is through all that which, practically and theoretically, exists for us today as this impossibility that we can relate ourselves to the history of past struggles and to the continuity of theoretical production. We don't attribute to these struggles and theoretical productions the consciousness or the possibility to see another perspective, because we can only relate to them through the mediation of a restructuring of the capitalist mode of production which was their defeat. We don't relate to these elements genealogically, but reproduce them in a problematic constituting a new paradigm of the contradiction between proletariat and capital.

It is true, there was never any "scope for a workers' capitalism", but that simply means that there was scope for a capitalist counter-revolution articulated within a workers' revolution based upon the seizing of factories, liberating labour, and erecting the proletariat as ruling class; a counter-revolution that was able to turn the latter's content back against it. If "the proletarians didn't come up with an alternative to Bolshevik policy,"[31]

[31] p. 114

it is because Bolshevik policy was the accomplishment *against them* of *their* revolution.

Just as in Spain against the *CNT*, the *UGT* or the *POUM*, the workers have nothing to oppose to the management of enterprises by *their organisations*, because the programme that they apply is their own. The revolution as affirmation of the class implacably transforms into the management of capital, smoothly reverts into the counter-revolution to which it provides its own content. Faced with this ineluctable reversal of their own movement, overseen by their own organisations, the workers are thrown back to resisting work. The revolution as affirmation of the class finds itself confronted by a counter-revolution which has for its content that which justified the revolution itself: the rising power of the class in the capitalist mode of production, its recognition and integration in the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. We could even call it the "dictatorship of the proletariat".

We can only agree with Dauvé and Nesic when they write that "the Russian revolutionary crisis shows that as long as capital reigns, labour can't be liberated and must be imposed upon the wage-earners."[32] And yet the social and historical mechanism of this dynamic must be made clear: the liberation of labour is impossible because it calls forth its own counter-revolution as capitalist organisation of work. Dauvé and Nesic dispel the problem saying: no revolution ever presented itself as such (except in the programme of the organisations). We have very briefly seen that this is false. Being unable to explain by what mechanism this impossibility imposes itself, they prefer to say that things didn't happen. Anyone can proclaim that "in 1917-21, the alternative was between abolishing wage labour or perpetuating exploitation, with no possible third option"[33] — it's a nice phrase, but it expresses absolutely nothing;

[32] p. 115
[33] *ibid.*

this situation that all the originality and importance, as much historical as theoretical, of this period lay.

Today every revindicative struggle of whatever size or intensity is self-organised and autonomous; self-organisation and autonomy can be opposed to the unions, but always remain merely a moment of unionism. We have passed from one cycle of struggle to another.

But for Dauvé and Nesic it is not enough to say that nothing happened, it is necessary to add that those for whom what happened was the revolution, as defined historically in its strength and its failure in its own terms, commit a methodological error: determinism. Any historical critique which fails to acknowledge the invariant substance and says that revolution and communism are historical is branded with the infamous epithet.

3 "false in regard to the method"

The "methodological error" of *Théorie Communiste* (not named) is supposed to consist in believing that there is a "situation" or a "period" in the history of the capitalist mode of production, and therefore of class struggle (but this "therefore" is, as we shall see, for Dauvé and Nesic another methodological error), which will assure the victory of the communist revolution. We finally confront the famous determinist devil.

Dauvé and Nesic do not see that the "error" they denounce is only an "error" if we accept all their presuppositions. Only if we suppose that the communist revolution is a given and known substance since the beginning of the class struggle within capitalism.[45] If we accept that the proletariat would have been able to do in 1968 what it did in 1848, in the Paris of

[45] Dating this conception of the invariance of communism to the emergence of capitalism is to give a charitable interpretation, because for Nesic (in *Call of the Void*) it seemed to go back much further, and for Dauvé in the *Banquise* it seemed inherent to the (unfortunately misguided) communal nature of humanity.

struggle is also the town, transport, housing, all of social life. By encompassing all of everyday life, class struggle becomes a refusal of the worker's condition, but it only encompasses all social life *from the basis of the factory*, the very extension only exists under the leadership, the tutorship, of the worker of the large factory: *Turin is* FIAT. This movement contains a contradiction between, on the one hand, the central figure of workers' identity, still dominating and structuring class struggle, on the basis of which this movement exists, and, on the other hand, the struggle over the entirety of reproduction which can thus not give everything that it contains, cannot put into question the condition of the worker itself. The struggle over the wage is the place of this contradiction, the place it becomes concrete. That which the workerists, in a programmatic perspective, theorised as "political wage" or "self-valorisation of the working class" was, as a practice, as a particular struggle, the contradiction in which, on the basis of the very situation of the worker and *within this*, the reproduction of the worker as such was put into question. The slogan of workers' power in the factories coexisted with the refusal to live outside as a worker and to be employed as a worker in that very factory. The class struggle developed within that highly contradictory and unstable configuration in which it is *labour* which refuses to function, in capitalism, as *labour power*.

Autonomy can only be programmatic, because it is by its very nature *workers'* autonomy. The movement of '69 is still a movement of the affirmation of the proletariat and the emancipation of labour, it is its dominant characteristic. It is only on the basis of this dominant characteristic that one can understand that it contains within it that which subsequently puts it into question, renders it impossible. It was the same workers who committed sabotage and organised the marches in the factories who regrouped in the CUB as in Pirelli, or who found themselves in the student-worker assemblies in Turin. It is in

says nothing about the period of "revolutionary crisis". In the sense that nobody — not a single social movement — posed such an opposition other than as the liberation of labour and the opening of a period of transition; the radical alternative, as Dauvé and Nesic present it, simply didn't exist.

In Italy, as in Russia, being unable to explain what happened, Dauvé and Nesic decide that nothing happened. For the whole period one must start from two principal facts: (1) there was a powerful organised workers' movement, which (2) had as a programme the affirmation/emancipation of labour (the workers' creating factory councils, etc.). These two major elements define the period's content. Faced with the reversal that they suffer, the workers are disarmed in the sense that that which is taken over by the organisations is in fact the perspective, now turned against them, that they themselves advance from their own ranks.

It is difficult to regard the articles and reports of Malatesta on the situation in Italy as merely a series of militant lies. On the 28th of June 1922, in *l'Umanità Nova*, Malatesta writes: "The metal workers started the movement over the question of wages. It turned out to be a strike of a new kind. Instead of abandoning the factories, they stayed in them without working, guarding them night and day against any lockout. But we were in 1920. All of proletarian Italy was trembling with revolutionary fever, and the movement rapidly changed character. The workers thought it was the moment to definitively take over the means of production. They armed themselves for defence, transformed numerous factories into veritable fortresses, and began to organise production for themselves."[34]

In Italy once more it is the revolutionary perspective of emancipation, of "seizing the factories", which allowed the state and the bourgeoisie to retake control of the situation

[34] Cited in Pier Carlo Masini, *Anarchistes et Communistes dans le mouvement des Conseils à Turin*, (Nautilus 1983), p. 63.

(with the violent intervention of the fascists). The number of occupations decline after the 25th of September 1920 with the signing of the accord between Aragonna, chief of the *CGL*, and the government of Giolitti:

> "the famous decree on the control of the factories is a joke, because it gives birth to a new band of bureaucrats who, *although they come from your ranks*, will not defend your interests, but only their position, because they seek to combine your interests with those of the bourgeoisie, which is to try to set a wolf to tend a goat."[35]

In *l'Umanità Nova* of the 10th September 1920, under the title *To the Metal Workers*, Malatesta writes:

> "Enter into relations between factories and with the railway workers for the provision of raw materials; come to agreements with cooperatives and with the people. Sell and exchange your products without dealing with ex-bosses."[36]

"Sell and exchange your products": in the very injunction of Malatesta to pursue and deepen revolutionary combat resides its failure and reversal into counter-revolution. The same worker who would applaud Malatesta will the very next day press for slowing down the work rate in "the enterprise in the hands of the workers". To take over the factories, emancipate productive labour, to make labour-time the measure of exchange, is value, is capital. As long as the revolution will have no other object than to liberate that which necessarily makes the proletariat a class of the capitalist mode of production, workers' organisations which are the expression of this

[35] Errico Malatesta, *Umanità Nova*, 23 September 1920. Emphasis added.
[36] in Errico Malatesta, *Articles politiques* (10/18 1979), p.274.

the critique in acts and often "with the feet" of the revolution as the rising strength and affirmation of the class. The workers only entered the factories at the moment of the return to work, often to oppose themselves violently to it. Here we are in agreement with the few remarks of Dauvé and Nesic on May '68. Where we diverge is in the fact that for them such a thing is not a historical product, but merely fits into the long list of examples that they evoke. It is supposed to have always been this way, from the simple fact of what the proletariat *is* and what the revolution *must be*.

For Dauvé and Nesic the end of the sixties is prosperity and the critique of prosperity (consumer society, everyday life, alienation), it is the workers' movement and the "critique of work" — the enigma is solved. The revolution must be both a workers' revolution and a human revolution, but only "workers'" because in the worker it is the human that is negated. As a worker the proletarian has the possibility to smash this society, as a human, to construct the new one. To remain at this position is to remain within an ideology born of the failure of '68. During that whole period, in Italy, France and elsewhere, class struggles expressed but failed to overcome the limits and impasses of the previous cycle, that of workers' identity, of autonomy, of self-organisation, that which formed the very definition of the revolutionary dynamic, whilst today they form its limit.

This contradiction internal to class struggle appeared in Italy, from the mid-sixties, in a very concrete manner, in the extension of struggles beyond the factories. On the one hand the central figure of the Italian working class, that through which all class struggle was structured, is that of the industrial triangle Milan–Turin–Genoa, and, in this triangle, principally the productive workers of the big manufacturers. On the other hand, such a concentration implies, and only exists through, the socialisation and massification of the working class beyond the immediate process of production. The workers'

tablishment of the proletariat as a ruling class which generalises its situation, universalises labour as a social relation, and the economy as the objectivity of a society founded on value. But the "May '68" period doesn't simply remain in this impossibility of being a programmatic revolution.

On the one hand we had a strong workers' movement with solid roots, the confirmation by capital of a workers' identity, a recognised strength of the class but a radical impossibility to transform this strength into an autonomous force and into a revolutionary affirmation of the class of labour. On the other, this impossibility was *positively* the extension of a revolt against all social reproduction, a revolt through which "the proletariat negated itself".

The revolution could only be the negation of the worker's condition, but it was necessary to seek it, not in the relation between proletariat and capital, but in the universality of alienation. *Universal*, and to this extent *human*, alienation. Through real subsumption capital had subjected all social reproduction, all aspects of life. In encompassing the whole of everyday life, the revolution was the negation of the proletarian condition. Through the universality of its negation the revolt became autonomised from its real conditions, it appeared to no longer flow directly from the situation of the working class, but from the universal alienation of which this situation was the consummation, the condensation.

The revolt against the condition of the working class, revolt against every aspect of life, was caught in a divergence. It could only express itself, only become effective, in turning against its own foundations, the workers' conditions, but not in order to suppress them, for it didn't find in itself the relation to capital which could have been that suppression, but in order to *separate* itself from them. "May '68" thus remained on the level of a revolt.

The workers fled the factories occupied by the unions, the youngest among them joined the student struggle, May '68 was

necessity will employ themselves to make it respected. Being unable to hold onto the articulation of these elements, Dauvé and Nesic have decided, against all the evidence, that the workers' never had the perspective or practice of the emancipation of labour. What is more, although for Dauvé and Nesic it was indeed the case that all of that was true of the organisations — to deny this would be very difficult — it is still necessary to explain who could have put such ideas into the heads of the organisations. The facts which were still visible in *When Insurrections Die*, and even more in the Preface to *Bilan*, have here disappeared. Nothing happened, move on, there is nothing to see.

Dauvé and Nesic see the problem without being able to connect the terms. In their argumentation they ceaselessly confuse the effective impossibility of the liberation of labour with its non-existence, just as they confuse the "liberation of labour" with "the liberating power of labour."

iv The workers didn't struggle to "make labour king" but to "curb further exploitation"

It is contentious to try to separate revindicative struggles in a given period from revolution and communism as they are defined in that same period. It is hardly credible to say that in 1848 the workers only struggled against the worsening of their conditions, that the insurgents only "rose to survive"[37], and that the struggles betrayed no perspective of the reorganisation of society around the "organisation of labour" and its generalisation, that is to say liberation, by the working class. Such incredibility is amply demonstrated by a glance at the political expressions of the Parisian working class in that year:

> "Marche, a worker, dictated the decree [decree on the right to work, 25 February 1848] by which the

[37] p. 110

> newly formed Provisional Government pledged itself to guarantee the workers a livelihood by means of labour, to provide work for all citizens, etc. And when a few days later it forgot its promises and seemed to have lost sight of the proletariat, a mass of 20,000 workers marched on the *Hôtel de Ville* with the cry: *Organise labour! Form a special Ministry of Labour.*"[38]

To "rise up in order to survive" is an expression as lacking in meaning in 1848 as it is in 2007. Every insurrection and even every strike, however "modest", always exists in a certain period of the contradiction between the proletariat and capital. To this degree, the defence of physical survival has no more existence in itself, is no more an ahistorical invariant, than is communism "in its deep content".

In the form of the National Workshops the "defence of survival" becomes a question of social regime: "The right to work is, in the bourgeois sense, an absurdity, a miserable, pious wish. But behind the right to work stands the power over capital; behind the power over capital, the appropriation of the means of production, their subjection to the associated working class, and therefore the abolition of wage labour, of capital, and of their mutual relations. Behind the "right to work" stood the June insurrection."[39]The Parisian workers "rose up to survive" and this insurrection for survival contained: "the organisation of labour," and the "submission of the means of production to the associated working class". A precise study of the insurrection of June shows that it was substantially supported by the unemployed workers of the National Workshops. Yet one finds in far greater number those who were not directly touched by the closure of the National Workshops: the local workers and

[38] Marx, *The Class Struggles in France* (*MECW 10*), p. 55.
[39] *ibid.* p. 78

link is made several times in their text, with the artisan, the manufacturing worker, the skilled worker, the mass worker. That which Dauvé and Nesic refuse to attribute to the contradiction between the proletariat and capital and its overcoming — to be a history — they accord to the action of historically existing workers. In a kind of impoverished *Operaismo*, they confer to "class composition" that which they can't allow for revolution and communism.

vii Desertion of the enterprise, "refusal of work"

The seventh objection is not exactly of the same nature as the others. It applies to the struggles at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. That is to say, to the period when programmatism is at the end of its course, the period in which we are ready to recognise that the affirmation of the proletariat and the liberation of labour are no longer the content and perspective of the class struggle. As a consequence, we could, to an extent, agree with the comments on these struggles, and at a push this objection would not be one at all. Yet only to an extent… and for two reasons. Firstly, Dauvé and Nesic recognise no historical break, for history is the looming absence in their whole normative horizon; the examples only succeed one another in a chronological order by the simple habit of thought and presentation — they could be presented in any other order without having the slightest influence on the "demonstration". Secondly, in accordance with their permanent denial of the reality of anything which could be seen as affirmation of labour, they fail to see that the overcoming of programmatism, very real in the struggles of this period, still takes place within programmatism.

The turn at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies was simply the breakdown of programmatism. "May '68" was the liquidation of all the old forms of the workers' movement. The revolution was no longer a question of the es-

of organisations and their programmes, it is completely insufficient to satisfy oneself with the distinction. When the principle factory organisations are grouped into two unions (*AAUD* and *AAUDE*) that together counted several hundred thousand members (not counting those adhering to the revolutionary unions) the programme of the *KAPD* is not an invention of the theoreticians of the *KAPD*. It is the only perspective that the struggle itself allows. In the period about which Dauvé and Nesic speak (in fact since 1848), the struggle for the emancipation of labour passes by a political struggle; that is, the abolition of existing society (whatever form this takes, seizure of power or abolition of the state) and establishment of the proletariat as a ruling class (which cannot fail to turn back on itself in the very course of its success as counter-revolution). The workers of Essen, Berlin and Turin "put work at the centre of society" by their very uprising. What else is the power of the councils where it momentarily establishes itself other than the power of workers as workers? Are we supposed to believe that the workers sought power for its own sake?

The seizure of state power, the political victory, is the necessary preamble, even the first act, of the emancipation of labour, the proletariat becoming a ruling class. In Germany between 1918 and 1923, in Italy in 1920, the political struggles for the power of the working class, the dictatorship of the proletariat, had for their content the affirmation of the proletariat as a ruling class and through this the generalization of its condition. Under the pretext that they see no (or very few) self-managed factories, Dauvé and Nesic deny that the political struggle had the affirmation of the proletariat as a ruling class for its object, that is to say, the emancipation of labour.

We can't help but note that in these pages on the "utopia of skilled labour", Dauvé and Nesic, for the second time, and contrary to their official religion, link a certain practice of the proletariat to a certain level of development of capital, that which they condemn in the theoretical conclusion of their text. This

the professions who had also been the most virulent during the quasi general strike which hit Paris in 1840.

On this connection between immediate struggles, political reform and social revolution, the most important movement of the period is without doubt Chartism. About this Dauvé and Nesic say not a word. For doing so would make it difficult to suggest that the aspiration to re-appropriate the means of production by the associated workers was only an ideology which had no correspondence in the practice or mobilisation of the workers, and that the resistance to the worsening of exploitation is a neutral and purely quantitative activity.

v The turn of 1848

For Dauvé and Nesic 1848 marks a turning point in the history of workers' struggles:

> "1848 tolled the knell of the utopia of a wage-labour capital, of a working class that would become the ruling class and then the unique or *universal* class through the absorption of capital in associated labour. From then on, via a growing union movement, the workers will only be concerned with their share of the wage system, they won't try to compete with the monopoly of capital owned by the bourgeoisie, but to constitute themselves as a monopoly of labour power. The programme of a popular capitalism was on the wane."[40]

Thus that which never existed nonetheless had an existence prior to 1848. The peculiarity of eclecticism is to fail to perceive that the elements which one juxtaposes may contradict each other. This consideration of the pre-1848 period is all the more

[40] p. 111

surprising given that this period of "wage-labour capital" is for them, in another respect, essentially that of the expression of communism in "its deep content": the proletariat of the human community, not yet bogged down in the defence of the wage (see below).

Thus the proletariat no longer attempted, after 1848, to become a ruling class. With a wave of the theoretical wand, Dauvé and Nesic manage to make the Commune vanish; they imply that all the post-1848 texts of Marx are apocryphal; they convince us that revolutionary syndicalism never existed. Even German Social Democracy, with its rising power of the class and the theory of the spontaneous socialization of capital leading to socialism, fails to fit with the need of Dauvé and Nesic to flatten class struggle in the extreme for fear of recognizing the infamous programmatism; even Bernstein and Hilferding disappear. The project of "a working class take over of industrialization" is over in 1848, just as that of "a working class that would become the ruling class."[41] Of course! If it didn't come from such good authors one would suspect simply ignorance, here one must also suspect the theoretical impasse of a discourse which after being tempted by an indeterminate "revolutionary élan" has to silence itself from fear of allowing it to be determined. Once again: move on, there is nothing to see!

If we can consider that 1848 is a break, it is only in the measure that that which was an *alternative* project, that is to say, able to coexist with bourgeois society (cooperatives etc.), became after '48 a political project presupposing the reversal of bourgeois society. Far from "tolling the knell" of workers' emancipation and the liberation of labour (articulated, of course, with the revindicative struggles of the working class), 1848 marked the generalisation of this project in a struggle of class against class.

[41] *ibid.*

vi Even at its apogee, the aspiration to make labour king was only half-hearted

And once again we find an epoch where that which never existed attained its apogee. Dauvé and Nesic concede that there might have been a period of the workers' composition of a world of free labour:

> "the aspiration to set up the workers as the ruling class and to build a workers' world was at its highest in the heyday of the labour movement, when the Second and Third Internationals were more than big parties and unions: they were a way of life, a counter-society… Workers' or 'industrial' democracy was an extension of a community (both myth and reality) … that shaped working class life from the aftermath of the Paris Commune to the 1950s or 60s."[42]

Here is a remarkable concession, but one which doesn't recognize that this organised workers' movement was also a counter-revolutionary force. Dauvé and Nesic want to insist that this "workers' world" which shaped the life of the working class was just a "utopia of skilled labour".[43] Yet even in Germany between 1919 and 1921, where for Dauvé and Nesic this movement of skilled workers had gone the furthest, "there were hardly any attempts to take over production in order to manage it. Whatever plans they may have nurtured, in practice neither the Essen and Berlin workers nor those in Turin put work at the centre of society, even of a socialist one."[44]

We've already seen in the case of Italy and Russia that if we shouldn't confuse the activity of workers with the activity

[42] p. 120
[43] p. 119
[44] p. 121