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In contradiction to the evolution of the 19th century, current historical trends appear to be moving in the direction of state coercion and hegemony. Without prejudging the ultimate value of such an assessment — which may later prove illusory — it is clear that it now overwhelmingly dominates the confused understanding and divergent interpretations of politics. Certain coincidences in the results of Fascism and Bolshevism have created the general perspectives of a bewildered consciousness of history — a consciousness which, under new conditions, is gradually transformed into irony and becomes accustomed to considering death.

Never mind the mediocre aspirations of today's liberalism — which find a tragic outcome here — but the labor movement itself is linked to the war against the state. Workers' consciousness has developed as a function of the dissolution of traditional authority. The slightest hope of revolution has been described as the withering away of the state: but it is, on the contrary, the revolutionary forces that the present world sees withering away, and at the same time, every living force has today taken the form of the totalitarian state. The revolutionary consciousness that awakens in this world of constraint is thus led to consider itself historically as nonsense:

it has become, to use Hegel's old formulas, torn consciousness and unhappy consciousness. Stalin, the shadow and chill cast by this name alone over all revolutionary hope — this, combined with the horror of the German and Italian police forces, is the image of a humanity where the cries of revolt have become politically negligible, where these cries are nothing but heartbreak and unhappiness.

In this situation, the misery of which is reflected in every aspect of activity, the reaction of official communism has been unspeakably vulgar: jovial blindness… Real human parakeets have accepted the worst departures from fundamental revolutionary principles as the very expression of proletarian authenticity. In the name of abject optimism, formally contradicted by the facts, they began to smear those who were suffering. This was not a childish persistence to hope; no real hope was bound up with peremptory assertions, but only an unavowed cowardice, an inability to realize and endure a dreadful situation.

Optimism may be the condition for all action, but without mentioning the vulgar lies that are often its source, optimism can become tantamount to the death of revolutionary consciousness. This consciousness (which reflects a given system of production with the social relations it implies) is by its very nature torn consciousness, consciousness of an unacceptable existence. In any case, it is fundamentally incompatible with the beatitudes of a party of official mercenaries. All the more so, in the present period, it is necessarily linked to the tragic nature of circumstances: it is thus reduced to the realization and anguish of a desperate situation as its own necessity. The optimism that opposes this attitude of complete reflection is the derision, not the safeguard, of revolutionary passion.

In such a movement of retreat — as, moreover, it occurs independently of wills — the profound claims of the Revolution are not abandoned: on the contrary, they are taken up again at their source, in close contact with what the historical movement tears apart and rejects towards misfortune. And if a renewed conception no longer

It is in this sense that it is necessary to say — in the face of three servile societies — that no human future worthy of the name can be expected except from the liberating anguish of proletarians.

represents revolutionary claims, naively, as a due the collection of which is implied, but, painfully, as a perishable force, this force, inscribing itself in blind chaos, loses the mechanical character it assumed in a fatalistic conception: just as in all anxious passion, it is liberated and enlarged by the awareness of possible death.

With this realization of the approaching danger to all humanity, the old geometric conception of the future disappears. The old regular and honest future gives way to anguish. Two centuries ago, the fate of future societies was described in accordance with legalistic dreams, with the immediate aim of removing every shadow from the prospects of bourgeois existence: at that moment, every frightening image of possible disorder and overwhelm was banished like a spectre. The labor movement was partly wrong to take up the naïve bourgeois apocalypse: it was almost foolish to burden matter, material production, with the most touching promises, as if, from a certain point onwards, necessarily, this production should bear no resemblance to the other material forces which, on all sides, leave indifferently free the possibilities of order and disorder, suffering and pleasure. Today, we would have to renounce all comprehension not to see that the admirable confidence inherent in Marx and socialism as a whole was justified emotionally, not scientifically: the possibility (perhaps the duty) of such an emotional justification has, moreover, only recently disappeared.

But today, if revolutionary affectivity has no other way out than the misfortune of consciousness, it returns to it as to its first mistress. Only in misfortune does it rediscover the painful intensity without which the fundamental resolution of the Revolution, the "neither God nor masters" of the workers in revolt, loses its radical brutality. Disoriented and disunited, the exploited must today measure themselves against the gods (the homelands) and the most imperative masters of all those who have ever enslaved them. And they must at the same time suspect each other, lest those who lead them into struggle become their masters in turn.

Yet it is likely that many human conquests have depended on a miserable or desperate situation. In fact, despair is practically the only affective behavior with the greatest dynamic value. It is thus the only possible — and necessary — dynamic element in today's circumstances, when theoretical data are called into question. Indeed, it would be impossible to sufficiently shake a theoretical apparatus that has the defect of being the common — and blind — faith of too many, without resorting to the justification of despair, without benefiting from a disoriented and anxious state of mind. Under these conditions, premature solutions, hasty regroupments on barely modified formulas, and even the mere belief in the possibility of such regroupments are all obstacles — admittedly negligible — to the desperate survival of the revolutionary movement. The future does not rest on the tiny efforts of a few incorrigibly optimistic regroupers: it depends entirely on general disorientation.

It is not even certain that current theoretical work can significantly overcome the profound disorientation that has become a dominant fact since the collapse of the workers' movement in Germany. While it is possible to identify the causes of the at least temporary ineffectiveness of revolutionary activity, the possibility of eliminating or modifying these causes is not given; consequently, the work that reveals such a situation appears first and foremost as vanity accomplished.

However, it is clear that time — the necessity of historical movement — remains capable of bringing about changes that cannot depend directly on the action of a party. And living in anticipation of such a change, it is still necessary not to succumb to the destructive forces which, today, have the initiative to attack the workers' movement. Now, perhaps, the time has come when those who, on all sides, speak of "the fight against fascism" should begin to understand that the conceptions which, in their minds, accompany this formula are no less childish than those of sorcerers fighting storms.

And since, on the other hand, unforeseeable and precipitous events may — even in the relatively near future — remove the obsta-

cles that now stand in the way of successful revolutionary activity, only the "violence of despair" is great enough to focus attention — as it must right now — on the fundamental problem of the state. In the face of such a problem, there is a disconcerting unwillingness, a sickly blindness, in revolutionary circles. Against all probability, it still seems to many Communists that Lenin's book goes on to answer every possible difficulty, which is proof enough of the bad conscience of blind agitators who think, deep down, that the problem is insoluble, and that consequently it is necessary to deny it. To declare, as they do, that after Lenin, the simple position of the problem is petty-bourgeois anarchism only further reveals this bad conscience (humanly speaking, there is no contempt strong enough to respond to the use of this old argument, a derisory insult to all good faith, an insult to the refusal to be blind). The problem of the State is indeed posed with nameless brutality, with the brutality of the police, as a kind of challenge to all hope. There can be no question of denying its existence, nor of retreating into pure principles (as the anarchists naively did). Social difficulties are not solved by principles, but by forces. That social forces can form and organize themselves in contradiction to the sovereignty of the dictatorial socialist state is something that only historical experience can confirm. But it is no less obvious that such a state, with the means of subsistence at its disposal for each participant, has a power of constraint that must find its limitation from within or without: and any external limitation is inconceivable if no social existence, no force independent of the state, is possible.

On the other hand, democratic institutions — achievable, and indeed demandable, within a proletarian party — can provide an internal limitation. But the principle of democracy, discredited by liberal politics, can only become a living force again as a function of the anguish provoked in the working classes by the birth of the three all-powerful states. On condition that this anguish is composed as an autonomous force, based on hatred of state authority.