

*“The fact that arms were brought out so quickly in response to the Stalinist provocation says a lot for the Catalanian masses’ immense capacities for autonomy; but the fact that the order to surrender issued by the anarchist ministers was so quickly obeyed demonstrates how much autonomy for victory they still lacked. Tomorrow again it will be the workers’ degree of autonomy that will decide our fate.”*

## **SITUATIONISTS ON ANARCHISM, MARXISM AND THE WORKING CLASS**

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by Guy Debord (1967)

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# The Proletariat as Subject and Representation

from “Society of the Spectacle” by Guy Debord (1967)

*“Equal right to all the goods and pleasures of this world, the destruction of all authority, the negation of all moral restraints — in the final analysis, these are the aims behind the March 18th insurrection and the charter of the fearsome organization that furnished it with an army.”*

—Parliamentary Inquest on the Paris Commune

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The real movement that transforms existing conditions has been the dominant social force since the bourgeoisie’s victory within the economic sphere, and this dominance became visible once that victory was translated onto the political plane. The development of productive forces shattered the old production relations, and all static order crumbled. Everything that was absolute became historical.

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When people are thrust into history and forced to participate in the work and struggles that constitute history, they find themselves obliged to view their relationships in a clear and disabused manner. This history has no object distinct from what it creates from out of itself, although the final unconscious metaphysical vision of the historical era considered the productive progression through which history had unfolded as itself the object of history. As for the subject of history, it can be nothing other than the self-production of the living — living people becoming masters and possessors of their own historical world and of their own fully conscious adventures.

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The class struggles of the long era of revolutions initiated by the rise of the bourgeoisie have developed in tandem with the dialectical “thought of history” — the thought which is no longer content to seek the meaning of what exists, but which strives to comprehend the dissolution of what exists, and in the process breaks down every separation.

severely restricted: not only by verifying, by considering all aspects of their lives, that such intellectuals are really councilist revolutionaries, but also by seeing to it that there are as few of them in the organization as possible.

The councilist organization will not consent to speak on equal terms with other organizations unless they are consistent partisans of proletarian autonomy; just as the councils will not only have to free themselves from the grip of parties and unions, but must also reject any tendency aiming to pigeonhole them in some limited position and to negotiate with them as one power to another. The councils are the only power or they are nothing. The means of their victory are already their victory. With the lever of the councils plus the fulcrum of the total negation of the spectacle-commodity society, the Earth can be raised.

The victory of the councils is not the end of the revolution, but the beginning of it.

## TRANSLATOR’S NOTES

1. What happened next: i.e. Mussolini’s fascist coup (1922).
2. Olivier, Blanco and Montseny: anarchist leaders who became ministers in the republican government during the Spanish civil war. Anarcho-trenchists: Kropotkin and other anarchists who supported World War I.

Translated by Ken Knabb

moment that abolishes separations; and it will have to do this even if the complete freedom of association guaranteed by the power of the councils allows various parties and organizations that are enemies of this power to survive. It may be doubted, however, that it is feasible to immediately dissolve all councilist organizations the very instant the councils first appear, as Pannekoek wished. The councilists should speak as councilists within the council, rather than staging an exemplary dissolution of their organizations only to regroup them on the side and play pressure-group politics in the general assembly. In this way it will be easier and more legitimate for them to combat and denounce the inevitable presence of bureaucrats, spies and ex-scabs who will infiltrate here and there. They will also have to struggle against fake councils or fundamentally reactionary ones (e.g. police councils) which will not fail to appear. They will act in such a way that the unified power of the councils does not recognize such bodies or their delegates. Because the infiltration of other organizations is exactly the contrary of the ends they are pursuing, and because they refuse any incoherence within themselves, councilist organization will prohibit any dual membership. As we have said, all the workers of a factory must take part in the council, or at least all those who accept the rules of its game. The solution to the problem of whether to accept participation in the council by “those who yesterday had to be thrown out of the factory at gunpoint” (Barth) will be found only in practice.

Ultimately, the councilist organization will stand or fall solely by the coherence of its theory and action and by its struggle for the complete elimination of all power remaining external to the councils or trying to make itself independent of them. But in order to simplify the discussion right off by refusing even to take into consideration a mass of councilist pseudo-organizations that may be simulated by students or obsessive professional militants, let us say that it does not seem to us that an organization can be recognized as councilist if it is not comprised of at least 2/3 workers. As this proportion might pass for a concession, let us add that it seems to us indispensable to correct it with this rider: in all delegations to central conferences at which decisions may be taken that have not previously been provided for by imperative mandates, workers must make up 3/4 of the participants. In sum, the inverse proportion of the first congresses of the “Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party.”

It is known that we have no inclination toward workerism of any form whatsoever. The above considerations refer to workers who have “become dialecticians,” as they will have to become en masse in the exercise of the power of the councils. But on the one hand, the workers continue to be the central force capable of bringing the existing functioning of society to a halt and the indispensable force for reinventing all its bases. On the other hand, although the councilist organization obviously must not separate other categories of wage-earners, notably intellectuals, from itself, it is in any case important that the dubious importance the latter may assume should be

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For Hegel the point was no longer to interpret the world, but to interpret the transformation of the world. But because he limited himself to merely interpreting that transformation, Hegel only represents the philosophical culmination of philosophy. He seeks to understand a world that develops by itself. This historical thought is still a consciousness that always arrives too late, a consciousness that can only formulate retrospective justifications of what has already happened. It has thus gone beyond separation only in thought. Hegel’s paradoxical stance — his subordination of the meaning of all reality to its historical culmination while at the same time proclaiming that his own system represents that culmination — flows from the simple fact that this thinker of the bourgeois revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought in his philosophy only a reconciliation with the results of those revolutions. “Even as a philosophy of the bourgeois revolution, it does not express the entire process of this revolution, but only its concluding phase. In this sense it is a philosophy not of the revolution, but of the restoration” (Karl Korsch, “Theses on Hegel and Revolution”). Hegel performed the task of the philosopher — “the glorification of what exists” — for the last time; but already what existed for him could be nothing less than the entire movement of history. Since he nevertheless maintained the external position of thought, this externality could be masked only by identifying that thought with a preexisting project of the Spirit — of that absolute heroic force which has done what it willed and willed what it has done, and whose ultimate goal coincides with the present. Philosophy, in the process of being superseded by historical thought, has thus arrived at the point where it can glorify its world only by denying it, since in order to speak it must presuppose that the total history to which it has relegated everything has already come to an end, and that the only tribunal where truth could be judged is closed.

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When the proletariat demonstrates through its own actions that this historical thought has not been forgotten, its refutation of that thought’s conclusion is at the same time a confirmation of its method.

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Historical thought can be saved only by becoming practical thought; and the practice of the proletariat as a revolutionary class can be nothing less than historical consciousness operating on the totality of its world. All the theoretical currents of the revolutionary working-class movement — Stirner and Bakunin as well as Marx — grew out of a critical confrontation with Hegelian thought.

The inseparability of Marx's theory from the Hegelian method is itself inseparable from that theory's revolutionary character, that is, from its truth. It is in this regard that the relationship between Marx and Hegel has generally been ignored or misunderstood, or even denounced as the weak point of what became fallaciously transformed into a doctrine: "Marxism." Bernstein implicitly revealed this connection between the dialectical method and historical partisanship when in his book *Evolutionary Socialism* he deplored the 1847 Manifesto's unscientific predictions of imminent proletarian revolution in Germany: "This historical self-deception, so erroneous that the most naïve political visionary could hardly have done any worse, would be incomprehensible in a Marx who at that time had already seriously studied economics if we did not recognize that it reflected the lingering influence of the antithetical Hegelian dialectic, from which Marx, like Engels, could never completely free himself. In those times of general effervescence this influence was all the more fatal to him."

The inversion carried out by Marx in order to "salvage" the thought of the bourgeois revolutions by transferring it to a different context does not trivially consist of putting the materialist development of productive forces in place of the journey of the Hegelian Spirit toward its eventual encounter with itself — the Spirit whose objectification is identical to its alienation and whose historical wounds leave no scars. For once history becomes real, it no longer has an end. Marx demolished Hegel's position of detachment from events, as well as passive contemplation by any supreme external agent whatsoever. Henceforth, theory's concern is simply to know what it itself is doing. In contrast, present-day society's passive contemplation of the movement of the economy is an untranscended holdover from the undialectical aspect of Hegel's attempt to create a circular system; it is an approval that is no longer on the conceptual level and that no longer needs a Hegelianism to justify itself, because the movement it now praises is a sector of a world where thought no longer has any place, a sector whose mechanical development effectively dominates everything. Marx's project is a project of conscious history, in which the quantitiveness that arises out of the blind development of merely economic productive forces must be transformed into a qualitative appropriation of history. The critique of political economy is the first act of this end of prehistory: "Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself."

In contrast to the council as permanent basic unit (ceaselessly setting up and modifying councils of delegates emanating from itself), as the assembly in which all the workers of an enterprise (workshop and factory councils) and all the inhabitants of an urban district who have rallied to the revolution (street councils, neighborhood councils) must participate, a councilist organization, in order to guarantee its coherence and the authentic working of its internal democracy, must choose its members in accordance with what they explicitly want and what they actually can do. As for the councils, their coherence is guaranteed by the single fact that they are the sole power; that they eliminate all other power and decide everything. This practical experience is the terrain where people learn how to become conscious of their own action, where they "realize philosophy." It goes without saying that their majorities also run the risk of making lots of momentary mistakes and not having the time or the means to rectify them. But they know that their fate is the product of their own decisions, and that they will be destroyed by the repercussions of any mistakes they don't correct.

Within councilist organizations real equality of everyone in making decisions and carrying them out will not be an empty slogan or an abstract demand. Of course, not all the members of an organization will have the same talents (it is obvious, for example, that a worker will invariably write better than a student). But because in its aggregate the organization will have all the talents it needs, no hierarchy of individual talents will come to undermine its democracy. It is neither membership in a councilist organization nor the proclamation of an ideal equality that will enable all its members to be beautiful and intelligent and to live well; but only their real aptitudes for becoming more beautiful and more intelligent and for living better, freely developing in the only game that's worth the pleasure: the destruction of the old world.

In the social movements that are going to spread, the councilists will refuse to let themselves be elected to strike committees. On the contrary, their task will be to act in such a way as to encourage the rank-and-file self-organization of the workers into general assemblies that decide how the struggle is carried out. It will be necessary to begin to understand that the absurd call for a "central strike committee" proposed by some naïve individuals during the May 1968 occupations movement would, had it succeeded, have sabotaged the movement toward the autonomy of the masses even more quickly than actually happened, since almost all the strike committees were controlled by the Stalinists.

Given that it is not for us to forge a plan for all time, and that one step forward by the real movement of the councils will be worth more than a dozen councilist programs, it is difficult to state precise hypotheses regarding the relation of councilist organizations with councils during a revolutionary situation. The councilist organization — which knows itself to be separated from the proletariat — must cease to exist as a separate organization in the

as automatically evil and harmful. Thus the Informations, Correspondance Ouvrières group writes in a recent bulletin (ICO #84, August 1969): “Councils are the transformation of strike committees under the influence of the situation itself and in response to the very necessities of the struggle, within the very dialectic of that struggle. Any other attempt, at any moment in a struggle, to declare the necessity of creating workers councils reveals a councilist ideology such as can be seen in diverse forms in certain unions, in the PSU, or among the situationists. The very concept of council excludes any ideology.” These individuals clearly know nothing about ideology — their own ideology is distinguished from more fully developed ones only by its spineless eclecticism. But they have heard (perhaps from Marx, perhaps only from the SI) that ideology has become a bad thing. They take advantage of this to try to have it believed that any theoretical work — which they avoid as if it were a sin — is an ideology, among the situationists exactly as in the PSU. But their gallant recourse to the “dialectic” and the “concept” which they have now added to their vocabulary in no way saves them from an imbecilic ideology of which the above quotation alone is evidence enough. If one idealistically relies on the council “concept” or, what is even more euphoric, on the practical inactivity of ICO, to “exclude all ideology” in the real councils, one must expect the worst — we have seen that historical experience justifies no such optimism in this regard. The supersession of the primitive council form can only come from struggles becoming more conscious, and from struggles for more consciousness. ICO’s mechanistic image of the strike committee’s perfect automatic response to “necessities,” which presents the council as automatically coming into existence at the appropriate time provided that one makes sure not to talk about it, completely ignores the experience of the revolutions of our century, which shows that “the situation itself” is just as ready to crush the councils, or to enable them to be manipulated and coopted, as it is to give rise to them.

Let us leave this contemplative ideology, this pathetic caricature of the natural sciences which would have us observe the emergence of a proletarian revolution almost as if it were a solar eruption. Councilist organizations will be formed, though they must be quite the contrary of general staffs that would cause the councils to rise up on order. In spite of the new period of open social crisis we have entered since the occupations movement, and the proliferation of encouraging situations here and there, from Italy to the USSR, it is quite likely that genuine councilist organizations will still take a long time to form and that other important revolutionary situations will occur before such organizations are in a position to intervene in them at a significant level. One must not play with councilist organization by setting up or supporting premature parodies of it. But the councils will certainly have greater chances of maintaining themselves as sole power if they contain conscious councilists and if there is a real appropriation of councilist theory.

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Marx’s theory is closely linked with scientific thought insofar as it seeks a rational understanding of the forces that really operate in society. But it ultimately goes beyond scientific thought, preserving it only by superseding it. It seeks to understand social struggles, not sociological laws. “We recognize only one science: the science of history” (The German Ideology).

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The bourgeois era, which wants to give history a scientific foundation, overlooks the fact that the science available to it could itself arise only on the foundation of the historical development of the economy. But history is fundamentally dependent on this economic knowledge only so long as it remains merely economic history. The extent to which the viewpoint of scientific observation could overlook history’s effect on the economy (an overall process modifying its own scientific premises) is shown by the vanity of those socialists who thought they had calculated the exact periodicity of economic crises. Now that constant government intervention has succeeded in counteracting the tendencies toward crisis, the same type of mentality sees this delicate balance as a definitive economic harmony. The project of transcending the economy and mastering history must grasp and incorporate the science of society, but it cannot itself be a scientific project. The revolutionary movement remains bourgeois insofar as it thinks it can master current history by means of scientific knowledge.

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The utopian currents of socialism, though they are historically grounded in criticism of the existing social system, can rightly be called utopian insofar as they ignore history (that is, insofar as they ignore actual struggles taking place and any passage of time outside the immutable perfection of their image of a happy society), but not because they reject science. On the contrary, the utopian thinkers were completely dominated by the scientific thought of earlier centuries. They sought the completion and fulfillment of that general rational system. They did not consider themselves unarmed prophets, for they firmly believed in the social power of scientific proof and even, in the case of Saint-Simonism, in the seizure of power by science. “Why,” Sombart asked, “would they want to seize through struggle what merely needed to be proved?” But the utopians’ scientific understanding did not include the awareness that some social groups have vested interests in maintaining the status quo, forces to maintain it, and forms of false consciousness to reinforce it. Their grasp of reality thus lagged far behind the historical reality of the development of science itself, which had been largely oriented by the social requirements arising from such factors, which determined not only what



findings were considered acceptable, but even what might or might not become an object of scientific research. The utopian socialists remained prisoners of the scientific manner of expounding the truth, viewing this truth as a pure abstract image — the form in which it had established itself at a much earlier stage of social development. As Sorel noted, the utopians took astronomy as their model for discovering and demonstrating the laws of society; their unhistorical conception of harmony was the natural result of their attempt to apply to society the science least dependent on history. They described this harmony as if they were Newtons discovering universal scientific laws, and the happy ending they constantly evoked “plays a role in their social science analogous to the role of inertia in classical physics” (Materials for a Theory of the Proletariat).

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The scientific-determinist aspect of Marx’s thought was precisely what made it vulnerable to “ideologization,” both during his own lifetime and even more so in the theoretical heritage he left to the workers movement. The advent of the historical subject continues to be postponed, and it is economics, the historical science par excellence, which is increasingly seen as guaranteeing the inevitability of its own future negation. In this way revolutionary practice, the only true agent of this negation, tends to be pushed out of theory’s field of vision. Instead, it is seen as essential to patiently study economic development, and to go back to accepting the suffering which that development imposes with a Hegelian tranquility. The result remains “a graveyard of good intentions.” The “science of revolutions” then concludes that consciousness always comes too soon, and has to be taught. “History has shown that we, and all who thought as we did, were wrong,” Engels wrote in 1895. “It has made clear that the state of economic development on the Continent at that time was far from being ripe.” Throughout his life Marx had maintained a unitary point of view in his theory, but the exposition of his theory was carried out on the terrain of the dominant thought insofar as it took the form of critiques of particular disciplines, most notably the critique of the fundamental science of bourgeois society, political economy. It was in this mutilated form, which eventually came to be seen as orthodox, that Marx’s theory was transformed into “Marxism.”

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The weakness of Marx’s theory is naturally linked to the weakness of the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat of his time. The German working class failed to inaugurate a permanent revolution in 1848; the Paris Commune was defeated in isolation. As a result, revolutionary theory could not yet be fully realized. The fact that Marx was reduced to defending and refining it by cloistered scholarly work in the British Museum had a debilitating effect

Union Deutschlands — German Communist Workers Union). A consciously minority organization, the KAUD was also the only one in the whole movement for councils in Germany that did not claim to take upon itself the future economic (or economico-political as in the case of the AAUD-E) organization of society. It called on the workers to form autonomous groups and to themselves handle the linkups between those groups. But in Germany the KAUD came much too late; by 1931 the revolutionary movement had been dead for nearly ten years.

If only to make them cry, let us remind the retarded devotees of the anarchist-Marxist feud that the CNT-FAI — with its dead weight of anarchist ideology, but also with its greater practice of liberatory imagination — was akin to the Marxist KAPD-AAUD in its organizational arrangements. In the same way as the German Communist Workers Party, the Iberian Anarchist Federation saw itself as the political organization of the conscious Spanish workers, while its AAUD, the CNT, was supposed to take charge of the management of the future society. The FAI militants, the elite of the proletariat, propagated the anarchist idea among the masses; the CNT did the practical work of organizing the workers in its unions. There were two essential differences, however, the ideological one of which was to bear the fruit one could have expected of it. The first was that the FAI did not strive to take power, but contented itself with influencing the overall policies of the CNT. The second was that the CNT really represented the Spanish working class. Adopted on 1 May 1936 at the CNT congress at Saragossa, two months before the revolutionary explosion, one of the most beautiful programs ever proclaimed by a revolutionary organization was partially put into practice by the anarchosindicalist masses, while their leaders foundered in ministerialism and class-collaboration. With the pimps of the masses, García Oliver, Secundo Blanco, etc., and the brothel-madam Montseny, the antistate libertarian movement, which had already tolerated the anarcho-trenchist Prince Kropotkin, finally attained the historical consummation of its ideological absolutism: government anarchists. (2) In the last historical battle it was to wage, anarchism was to see all the ideological sauce that comprised its being fall back into its face: State, Freedom, Individual, and other musty ingredients with capital letters; while the libertarian militians, workers and peasants were saving its honor, making the greatest practical contribution ever to the international proletarian movement, burning churches, fighting on all fronts against the bourgeoisie, fascism and Stalinism, and beginning to create a truly communist society.

Some present-day organizations cunningly pretend not to exist. This enables them to avoid bothering with the slightest clarification of the bases on which they assemble any assortment of people (while magically labeling them all “workers”); to avoid giving their semimembers any account of the informal leadership that holds the controls; and to thoughtlessly denounce any theoretical expression and any other form of organization

the ongoing critique of their own practice. Maintaining a unitary program and practice, they will refuse the old partitioning of the workers movement into separate organizations (i.e. parties and unions). Despite the beautiful history of the councils, all the councilist organizations of the past that have played a significant role in class struggles have accepted separation into political, economic and social sectors. One of the few old parties worth analysis, the Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands (KAPD, German Communist Workers Party), adopted a councilist program, but by assigning to itself as its only essential tasks propaganda and theoretical discussion — “the political education of the masses” — it left the role of federating the revolutionary factory organizations to the Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands (AAUD, General Workers Union of Germany), a schema not far from traditional syndicalism. Even though the KAPD rejected the Leninist idea of the mass party, along with the parliamentarianism and syndicalism of the KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands — German Communist Party), and preferred to group together politically conscious workers, it nevertheless remained tied to the old hierarchical model of the vanguard party: professionals of Revolution and salaried propagandists. A rejection of this model (in particular, a rejection of the practice of separating the political organization from the revolutionary factory organizations) led in 1920 to the secession of some of the AAUD members, who then formed the AAUD-E (the ‘E’ for Einheitsorganisation — Unified Organization). By the very working of its internal democracy the new unitary organization aimed to accomplish the educative work that had until then devolved on the KAPD, and it simultaneously assigned itself the task of coordinating struggles: the factory organizations that it federated were supposed to transform themselves into councils at the revolutionary moment and take over the management of the society. Here again the modern watchword of workers councils was still mixed with messianic memories of the old revolutionary syndicalism: the factory organizations would magically become councils when all the workers took part in them.

All that led where it would. After the crushing of the 1921 insurrection and the repression of the movement, large numbers of workers, discouraged by the waning prospect of revolution, abandoned factory struggle. The AAUD was only another name for the KAPD, and the AAUD-E saw revolution recede as fast as its membership declined. They were no longer anything but bearers of a councilist ideology more and more cut off from reality.

The KAPD’s evolution into terrorism and the AAUD’s increasing involvement in “bread and butter” issues led to the split between the factory organization and its party in 1929. In 1931 the corpses of the AAUD and the AAUD-E pathetically and without any sound or explicit bases merged in the face of the rise of Nazism. The revolutionary elements of the two organizations regrouped to form the KAUD (Kommunistische Arbeiter

on the theory itself. His scientific conclusions about the future development of the working class, and the organizational practice apparently implied by those conclusions, became obstacles to proletarian consciousness at a later stage.

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The theoretical shortcomings of the scientific defense of proletarian revolution (both in its content and in its form of exposition) all ultimately result from identifying the proletariat with the bourgeoisie with respect to the revolutionary seizure of power.

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As early as the Communist Manifesto, Marx’s effort to demonstrate the legitimacy of proletarian power by citing a repetitive sequence of precedents led him to oversimplify his historical analysis into a linear model of the development of modes of production, in which class struggles invariably resulted “either in a revolutionary transformation of the entire society or in the mutual ruin of the contending classes.” The plain facts of history, however, are that the “Asiatic mode of production” (as Marx himself acknowledged elsewhere) maintained its immobility despite all its class conflicts; that no serf uprising ever overthrew the feudal lords; and that none of the slave revolts in the ancient world ended the rule of the freemen. The linear schema loses sight of the fact that the bourgeoisie is the only revolutionary class that has ever won; and that it is also the only class for which the development of the economy was both the cause and the consequence of its taking control of society. The same oversimplification led Marx to neglect the economic role of the state in the management of class society. If the rising bourgeoisie seemed to liberate the economy from the state, this was true only to the extent that the previous state was an instrument of class oppression within a static economy. The bourgeoisie originally developed its independent economic power during the medieval period when the state had been weakening and feudalism was breaking up the stable equilibrium between different powers. In contrast, the modern state — which began to support the bourgeoisie’s development through its mercantile policies and which developed into the bourgeoisie’s own state during the laissez-faire era — was eventually to emerge as a central power in the planned management of the economic process. Marx was nevertheless able to describe the “Bonapartist” prototype of modern statist bureaucracy, the fusion of capital and state to create a “national power of capital over labor, a public force designed to maintain social servitude” — a form of social order in which the bourgeoisie renounces all historical life apart from what has been reduced to the economic history of things, and would like to be “condemned to the same political nothingness as all the other

classes.” The sociopolitical foundations of the modern spectacle are already discernable here, and these foundations negatively imply that the proletariat is the only pretender to historical life.

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The only two classes that really correspond to Marx’s theory, the two pure classes that the entire analysis of Capital brings to the fore, are the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. These are also the only two revolutionary classes in history, but operating under very different conditions. The bourgeois revolution is done. The proletarian revolution is a yet-unrealized project, born on the foundation of the earlier revolution but differing from it qualitatively. If one overlooks the originality of the historical role of the bourgeoisie, one also tends to overlook the specific originality of the proletarian project, which can achieve nothing unless it carries its own banners and recognizes the “immensity of its own tasks.” The bourgeoisie came to power because it was the class of the developing economy. The proletariat cannot create its own new form of power except by becoming the class of consciousness. The growth of productive forces will not in itself guarantee the emergence of such a power — not even indirectly by way of the increasing dispossession which that growth entails. Nor can a Jacobin-style seizure of the state be a means to this end. The proletariat cannot make use of any ideology designed to disguise its partial goals as general goals, because the proletariat cannot preserve any partial reality that is truly its own.

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If Marx, during a certain period of his participation in the proletarian struggle, placed too great a reliance on scientific prediction, to the point of creating the intellectual basis for the illusions of economism, it is clear that he himself did not succumb to those illusions. In a well-known letter of 7 December 1867, accompanying an article criticizing Capital which he himself had written but which he wanted Engels to present to the press as the work of an adversary, Marx clearly indicated the limits of his own science: “The author’s subjective tendency (imposed on him, perhaps, by his political position and his past), namely the manner in which he views and presents the final outcome of the present movement and social process, has no connection with his actual analysis.” By thus disparaging the “tendentious conclusions” of his own objective analysis, and by the irony of the “perhaps” with reference to the extrascientific choices supposedly “imposed” on him, Marx implicitly revealed the methodological key to fusing the two aspects.

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The fusion of knowledge and action must be effected within the historical

Only historical practice, through which the working class must discover and realize all its possibilities, will indicate the precise organizational forms of council power. On the other hand, it is the immediate task of revolutionaries to determine the fundamental principles of the councilist organizations that are going to arise in every country. By formulating some hypotheses and recalling the fundamental requirements of the revolutionary movement, this article — which should be followed by others — is intended to initiate a genuine and egalitarian debate. The only people who will be excluded from this debate are those who refuse to pose the problem in these terms, those who in the name of some sub-anarchist spontaneism proclaim their opposition to any form of organization, and who only reproduce the defects and confusion of the old movement — mystics of nonorganization, workers discouraged by having been mixed up with Trotskyist sects too long, students imprisoned in their impoverishment who are incapable of escaping from bolshevik organizational schemas. The situationists are obviously partisans of organization — the existence of the situationist organization testifies to that. Those who announce their agreement with our theses while crediting the SI with a vague spontaneism simply don’t know how to read.

Organization is indispensable precisely because it isn’t everything and doesn’t enable everything to be saved or won. Contrary to what butcher Noske said (in Von Kiel bis Kapp) about the events of 6 January 1919, the masses did not fail to become “masters of Berlin on noon that day” because they had “fine talkers” instead of “determined leaders,” but because the factory councils’ form of autonomous organization had not yet attained a sufficient level of autonomy for them to be able to do without “determined leaders” and separate organizations to handle their linkups. The shameful example of Barcelona in May 1937 is another proof of this: the fact that arms were brought out so quickly in response to the Stalinist provocation says a lot for the Catalanian masses’ immense capacities for autonomy; but the fact that the order to surrender issued by the anarchist ministers was so quickly obeyed demonstrates how much autonomy for victory they still lacked. Tomorrow again it will be the workers’ degree of autonomy that will decide our fate.

The councilist organizations that will be formed will therefore not fail to recognize and appropriate, as indeed a minimum, the “Minimum Definition of Revolutionary Organizations”, adopted by the 7th Conference of the SI (see Internationale Situationniste #11). Since their task will be to work toward the power of the councils, which is incompatible with any other form of power, they will be aware that a merely abstract agreement with this definition condemns them to nonexistence; this is why their real agreement will be practically demonstrated in the nonhierarchical relations within their groups or sections; in the relations between these groups and with other autonomous groups or organizations; in the development of revolutionary theory and the unitary critique of the ruling society; and in



councils represent the government and the management of society.” (Article in *Ordine Nuovo*.) Since the councils have been reduced to economico-social fragments preparing the way for a “future Soviet republic,” it goes without saying that the Party, that “Modern Prince,” appears as the indispensable political mediation, as the preexisting *deus ex machina* taking care to ensure its future existence: “The Communist Party is the instrument and historical form of the process of internal liberation thanks to which the workers, from being executants become initiators, from being masses become leaders and guides, from being muscles are transformed into minds and wills” (*Ordine Nuovo*, 1919). The tune may change, but the song of councilism remains the same: Councils, Party, State. To treat the councils fragmentarily (economic power, social power, political power), as does the councilist cretinism of the *Révolution Internationale* group of Toulouse, is like thinking that by clenching your ass you’ll only be buggered half way.

After 1918 Austro-Marxism also constructed a councilist ideology of its own, in accordance with the slow reformist evolution that it advocated. Max Adler, for example, in his book *Democracy and Workers Councils*, recognizes councils as instruments of workers’ self-education which could end the separation between order-givers and order-takers and serve to form a homogenous people capable of implementing socialist democracy. But he also realizes that the fact that councils of workers hold some power in no way guarantees that they have a coherent revolutionary aim: for that, the worker members of the councils must explicitly want to transform the society and bring about socialism. Since Adler is a theorist of legalized dual power, that is, of an absurdity that will never be capable of lasting as it gradually approaches revolutionary consciousness and prudently prepares a revolution for later on, he inevitably overlooks the single really fundamental element of the proletariat’s self-education: revolution itself. To replace this irreplaceable terrain of proletarian homogenization and this sole mode of selection for the very formation of the councils as well as for the formation of ideas and coherent modes of activity within the councils, Adler comes to the point of imagining that there is no other remedy than this incredibly moronic rule: “The right to vote in workers council elections must depend on membership in a socialist organization.”

Leaving aside the social-democratic or Bolshevik ideologies about the councils, which from Berlin to Kronstadt always had a Noske or a Trotsky too many, councilist ideology itself, as manifested in past councilist organizations and in some present ones, has always had several general assemblies and imperative mandates too few. All the councils that have existed until now, with the exception of the agrarian collectives of Aragon, saw themselves as simply “democratically elected councils,” even when the highest moments of their practice, when all decisions were made by sovereign general assemblies mandating revocable delegates, contradicted this limitation.

struggle itself, in such a way that each depends on the other for its validation. The proletarian class is formed into a subject in its process of organizing revolutionary struggles and in its reorganization of society at the moment of revolution — this is where the practical conditions of consciousness must exist, conditions in which the theory of praxis is confirmed by becoming practical theory. But this crucial question of organization was virtually ignored by revolutionary theory during the period when the workers movement was first taking shape — the very period when that theory still possessed the unitary character it had inherited from historical thought (and which it had rightly vowed to develop into a unitary historical practice). Instead, the organizational question became the weakest aspect of radical theory, a confused terrain lending itself to the revival of hierarchical and statist tactics borrowed from the bourgeois revolution. The forms of organization of the workers movement that were developed on the basis of this theoretical negligence tended in turn to inhibit the maintenance of a unitary theory by breaking it up into various specialized and fragmented disciplines. This ideologically alienated theory was then no longer able to recognize the practical verifications of the unitary historical thought it had betrayed when such verifications emerged in spontaneous working-class struggles; instead, it contributed toward repressing every manifestation and memory of them. Yet those historical forms that took shape in struggle were precisely the practical terrain that was needed in order to validate the theory. They were what the theory needed, yet that need had not been formulated theoretically. The soviet, for example, was not a theoretical discovery. And the most advanced theoretical truth of the International Workingmen’s Association was its own existence in practice.

## 91

The First International’s initial successes enabled it to free itself from the confused influences of the dominant ideology that had survived within it. But the defeat and repression that it soon encountered brought to the surface a conflict between two different conceptions of proletarian revolution, each of which contained an authoritarian aspect that amounted to abandoning the conscious self-emancipation of the working class. The feud between the Marxists and the Bakuninists, which eventually became irreconcilable, actually centered on two different issues — the question of power in a future revolutionary society and the question of the organization of the current movement — and each of the adversaries reversed their position when they went from one aspect to the other. Bakunin denounced the illusion that classes could be abolished by means of an authoritarian implementation of state power, warning that this would lead to the formation of a new bureaucratic ruling class and to the dictatorship of the most knowledgeable (or of those reputed to be such). Marx, who believed that the concomitant maturation of

economic contradictions and of the workers' education in democracy would reduce the role of a proletarian state to a brief phase needed to legitimize the new social relations brought into being by objective factors, denounced Bakunin and his supporters as an authoritarian conspiratorial elite who were deliberately placing themselves above the International with the harebrained scheme of imposing on society an irresponsible dictatorship of the most revolutionary (or of those who would designate themselves as such). Bakunin did in fact recruit followers on such a basis: "In the midst of the popular tempest we must be the invisible pilots guiding the revolution, not through any kind of overt power but through the collective dictatorship of our Alliance — a dictatorship without any badges or titles or official status, yet all the more powerful because it will have none of the appearances of power." Thus two ideologies of working-class revolution opposed each other, each containing a partially true critique, but each losing the unity of historical thought and setting itself up as an ideological authority. Powerful organizations such as German Social Democracy and the Iberian Anarchist Federation faithfully served one or the other of these ideologies; and everywhere the result was very different from what had been sought.

## 92

The fact that anarchists have seen the goal of proletarian revolution as immediately present represents both the strength and the weakness of collectivist anarchist struggles (the only forms of anarchism that can be taken seriously — the pretensions of the individualist forms of anarchism have always been ludicrous). From the historical thought of modern class struggles collectivist anarchism retains only the conclusion, and its constant harping on this conclusion is accompanied by a deliberate indifference to any consideration of methods. Its critique of political struggle has thus remained abstract, while its commitment to economic struggle has been channeled toward the mirage of a definitive solution that will supposedly be achieved by a single blow on this terrain, on the day of the general strike or the insurrection. The anarchists have saddled themselves with fulfilling an ideal. Anarchism remains a merely ideological negation of the state and of class society — the very social conditions which in their turn foster separate ideologies. It is the ideology of pure freedom, an ideology that puts everything on the same level and loses any conception of the "historical evil" (the negation at work within history). This fusion of all partial demands into a single all-encompassing demand has given anarchism the merit of representing the rejection of existing conditions in the name of the whole of life rather than from the standpoint of some particular critical specialization; but the fact that this fusion has been envisaged only in the absolute, in accordance with individual whim and in advance of any practical actualization, has doomed anarchism to an all too obvious incoherence. Anarchism responds to each particular struggle by

the eyes of the workers, wanted workers in certain branches of industry to elect "delegates who would form a sort of parliament designed to regulate their work and keep watch over the bureaucratic administration" (The Social Revolution). The idea of a hierarchized system of workers' representation culminating in a parliament was to be implemented most convincingly by Ebert, Noske and Scheidemann. The way this type of councilism treats the councils was definitively demonstrated — for anyone who doesn't have shit for brains — as long ago as 9 November 1918, when the Social Democrats combated the spontaneous organization of the councils on its own ground by founding in the Vorwärts offices a "Council of the Workers and Soldiers of Berlin" consisting of 12 loyal factory workers along with a few Social-Democratic leaders and functionaries.

Bolshevik councilism has neither Kautsky's naïveté nor Ebert's crudeness. It springs from the most radical base — "All power to the soviets" — and lands on the other side of Kronstadt. In *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* (April 1918) Lenin adds enzymes to Kautsky's detergent: "Even in the most democratic capitalist republics in the world, the poor never regard the bourgeois parliament as 'their' institution. . . . It is the closeness of the Soviets to the 'people,' to the working people, that creates the special forms of recall and other means of control from below which must now be most zealously developed. For example, the Councils of Public Education — periodic conferences of Soviet electors and their delegates convoked to discuss and control the activities of the Soviet authorities in this field — deserve our full sympathy and support. Nothing could be sillier than to transform the Soviets into something congealed and self-contained. The more resolutely we have to stand for a ruthlessly firm government, for the dictatorship of individuals in certain processes of work and in certain aspects of purely executive functions, the more varied must be the forms and methods of control from below in order to counteract the slightest hint of any potential distortion of the principles of Soviet government, in order tirelessly and repeatedly to weed out bureaucracy." For Lenin, then, the councils, like charitable institutions, should become pressure groups correcting the inevitable bureaucratization of the state's political and economic functions, respectively handled by the Party and the unions. The councils are the social component that, like Descartes soul, has to be hooked on somewhere.

Gramsci himself merely cleanses Lenin in a bath of democratic niceties: "The factory commissioners are the only true social (economic and political) representatives of the working class because they are elected under universal suffrage by all the workers in the workplace itself. At the different levels of their hierarchy, the commissioners represent the union of all the workers in various levels of production units (work gang, factory department, union of factories in an industry, union of enterprises in a city, union of production units of mechanical and agricultural industries in a district, a province, a region, the nation, the world), whose councils and system of

Dorrenbach's sailors; finally, they tolerated the crushing of the Spartakist insurrection on the very eve of those elections. In 1956 the Central Workers Council of Greater Budapest, constituted on November 14 and declaring itself determined to defend socialism, demanded "the withdrawal of all political parties from the factories" while at the same time pronouncing itself in favor of Nagy's return to power and free elections within a short time. It is true that this was during the time it was continuing the general strike despite the Russian troops' having already crushed the armed resistance. But even before the second Russian intervention the Hungarian councils had called for parliamentary elections: that is to say, they themselves were seeking to return to a dual-power situation at a time when they were in fact, in the face of the Russians, the only actual power in Hungary.

Consciousness of what the power of the councils is and must be arises from the very practice of that power. But at an impeded stage of that power it may be very different from what one or another isolated member of a council, or even an entire council, thinks. Ideology opposes the truth in acts whose field is the system of the councils; and such ideology manifests itself not only in the form of hostile ideologies, or in the form of ideologies about the councils devised by political forces that want to subjugate them, but also in the form of an ideology in favor of the power of the councils, which restrains and reifies their total theory and practice. A pure councilism will inevitably prove to be an enemy of the reality of the councils. There is a risk that such an ideology, more or less consistently formulated, will be borne by revolutionary organizations that are in principle in favor of the power of the councils. This power, which is itself the organization of revolutionary society and whose coherence is objectively determined by the practical necessities of this historical task grasped as a whole, can in no case escape the practical problem posed by specialist organizations which, whether enemies of the councils or more or less genuinely in favor of them, will inevitably interfere in their functioning. The masses organized in councils must be aware of this problem and overcome it. This is where councilist theory and the existence of authentically councilist organizations have a great importance. In them already appear certain essential points that will be at stake in the councils and in their own interaction with the councils.

All revolutionary history shows the part played in the failure of the councils by the emergence of a councilist ideology. The ease with which the spontaneous organization of the proletariat in struggle wins its first victories is often the prelude to a second phase in which counterrevolution works from the inside, in which the movement lets go of its reality in order to pursue the illusion that amounts to its defeat. Councilism is the artificial respiration that revives the old world.

Social democrats and Bolsheviks are in agreement in wishing to see in the councils only an auxiliary body of the party and the state. In 1902 Kautsky, worried because the unions were becoming discredited in

repeating and reapplying the same simple and all-embracing lesson, because this lesson has from the beginning been considered the be-all and end-all of the movement. This is reflected in Bakunin's 1873 letter of resignation from the Jura Federation: "During the past nine years the International has developed more than enough ideas to save the world, if ideas alone could save it, and I challenge anyone to come up with a new one. It's no longer the time for ideas, it's time for actions." This perspective undoubtedly retains proletarian historical thought's recognition that ideas must be put into practice, but it abandons the historical terrain by assuming that the appropriate forms for this transition to practice have already been discovered and will never change.

### 93

The anarchists, who explicitly distinguish themselves from the rest of the workers movement by their ideological conviction, reproduce this separation of competencies within their own ranks by providing a terrain that facilitates the informal domination of each particular anarchist organization by propagandists and defenders of their ideology, specialists whose mediocre intellectual activity is largely limited to the constant regurgitation of a few eternal truths. The anarchists' ideological reverence for unanimous decisionmaking has ended up paving the way for uncontrolled manipulation of their own organizations by specialists in freedom; and revolutionary anarchism expects the same type of unanimity, obtained by the same means, from the masses once they have been liberated. Furthermore, the anarchists' refusal to take into account the great differences between the conditions of a minority banded together in present-day struggles and of a postrevolutionary society of free individuals has repeatedly led to the isolation of anarchists when the moment for collective decisionmaking actually arrives, as is shown by the countless anarchist insurrections in Spain that were contained and crushed at a local level.

### 94

The illusion more or less explicitly maintained by genuine anarchism is its constant belief that a revolution is just around the corner, and that the instantaneous accomplishment of this revolution will demonstrate the truth of anarchist ideology and of the form of practical organization that has developed in accordance with that ideology. In 1936 anarchism did indeed initiate a social revolution, a revolution that was the most advanced expression of proletarian power ever realized. But even in that case it should be noted that the general uprising began as a merely defensive reaction to the army's attempted coup. Furthermore, inasmuch as the revolution was not carried to completion during its opening days (because Franco controlled half the country and was being strongly supported from abroad, because the rest of the international proletarian movement had already been defeated, and

because the anti-Franco camp included various bourgeois forces and statist working-class parties), the organized anarchist movement proved incapable of extending the revolution's partial victories, or even of defending them. Its recognized leaders became government ministers, hostages to a bourgeois state that was destroying the revolution even as it proceeded to lose the civil war.

## 95

The "orthodox Marxism" of the Second International is the scientific ideology of socialist revolution, an ideology which identifies its whole truth with objective economic processes and with the progressive recognition of the inevitability of those processes by a working class educated by the organization. This ideology revives the faith in pedagogical demonstration that was found among the utopian socialists, combining that faith with a contemplative invocation of the course of history; but it has lost both the Hegelian dimension of total history and the static image of totality presented by the utopians (most richly by Fourier). This type of scientific attitude, which can do nothing more than resurrect the traditional dilemmas between symmetrical ethical choices, is at the root of Hilferding's absurd conclusion that recognizing the inevitability of socialism "gives no indication as to what practical attitude should be adopted. For it is one thing to recognize that something is inevitable, and quite another to put oneself in the service of that inevitability" (*Finanzkapital*). Those who failed to realize that for Marx and for the revolutionary proletariat unitary historical thought was in no way distinct from a practical attitude to be adopted generally ended up becoming victims of the practice they did adopt.

## 96

The ideology of the social-democratic organizations put those organizations under the control of the professors who were educating the working class, and their organizational forms corresponded to this type of passive apprenticeship. The participation of the socialists of the Second International in political and economic struggles was admittedly concrete, but it was profoundly uncritical. It was a manifestly reformist practice carried on in the name of an illusory revolutionism. This ideology of revolution inevitably foundered on the very successes of those who proclaimed it. The elevation of socialist journalists and parliamentary representatives above the rest of the movement encouraged them to become habituated to a bourgeois lifestyle (most of them had in any case been recruited from the bourgeois intelligentsia). And even industrial workers who had been recruited out of struggles in the factories were transformed by the trade-union bureaucracy into brokers of labor-power, whose task was to make sure that that commodity was sold at a "fair" price. For the activity of all these people to have retained any appearance of being revolutionary, capitalism would have had to have turned out to be

had to use warships to land troops at Genoa to march on Turin. While the councilist program was later to be approved by the Congress of the Italian Anarchist Union when it met at Bologna on July 1, the Socialist Party and the unions succeeded in sabotaging the strike by keeping it isolated: when Turin was besieged by 20,000 soldiers and police, the party newspaper *Avanti* refused to print the appeal of the Turin socialist section (see Masini, op. cit.). The strike, which would clearly have made possible a victorious insurrection in the whole country, was vanquished on April 24. What happened next is well known. (1)

In spite of certain remarkably advanced features of this rarely mentioned experience (numerous leftists are under the mistaken impression that factory occupations took place for the first time in France in 1936), it should be noted that it contains serious ambiguities, even among its partisans and theorists. Gramsci wrote in *Ordine Nuovo* (second year, #4): "We see the factory council as the historic beginning of a process that must ultimately lead to the foundation of the workers' state." For their part, the councilist anarchists were sparing in their criticism of labor unionism and claimed that the councils would give it a renewed impetus.

However, the manifesto launched by the Turin councilists on 27 March 1920, "To the Workers and Peasants of All Italy," calling for a general congress of the councils (which never took place), formulates some essential points of the council program: "The struggle for conquest must be fought with arms of conquest, and no longer only with those of defense (SI note: this is aimed at the unions, which the manifesto describes elsewhere as "organisms of resistance . . . crystallized into a bureaucratic form"). A new organization must be developed as a direct antagonist of the organs of the bosses' government; for that task it must spring up spontaneously in the workplace and unite all the workers, because all of them, as producers, are subjected to an authority that is alien (*estranea*) to them, and must liberate themselves from it. . . . This is the beginning of freedom for you: the beginning of a social formation that by rapidly and universally extending itself will put you in a position to eliminate the exploiter and the middleman from the economic field and to become yourselves the masters — the masters of your machines, of your work, and of your life . . ."

The majority of the Workers and Soldiers Councils in the Germany of 1918-1919 were more crudely dominated by the Social-Democratic bureaucracy or were victims of its maneuvers. They tolerated Ebert's "socialist" government, whose main support came from the General Staff and the *Freikorps*. The "Hamburg seven points" (calling for the immediate dissolution of the old Army), presented by Dorrenbach and passed with a large majority by the Congress of Soldiers Councils that opened December 16 in Berlin, were not implemented by the "People's Commissars." The councils tolerated this defiance, and the legislative elections that had been quickly set for January 19; then they tolerated the attack launched against



Committee in which the “technical advisors” from the political parties had an enormous influence.

How did this soviet originate? It seems that this form of organization was discovered by certain politically aware elements among the ordinary workers, who for the most part themselves belonged to one or another socialist fraction. Trotsky seems to be quite unjustified in writing that “one of the two social-democratic organizations in St. Petersburg took the initiative of creating an autonomous revolutionary workers’ administration” (moreover, the “one of the two” organizations that did at least immediately recognize the significance of this workers’ initiative was the Mensheviks, not the Bolsheviks). But the general strike of October 1905 in fact originated first of all in Moscow on September 19, when the typographers of the Sytine printing works went on strike, notably because they wanted punctuation marks to be counted among the 1000 characters that constituted their unit of payment. Fifty printing works followed them out, and on September 25 the Moscow printers formed a council. On October 3 “the assembly of workers’ deputies from the printers, mechanics, carpenters, tobacco workers and other guilds adopted the resolution to set up a general council (soviet) of Moscow workers” (Trotsky, op. cit.). It can thus be seen that this form appeared spontaneously at the beginning of the strike movement. And this movement, which began to fall back in the next few days, was to surge forward again up to the great historic crisis when on October 7 the railroad workers, beginning in Moscow, spontaneously began to stop the railway traffic.

The council movement in Turin of March-April 1920 originated among the highly concentrated proletariat of the Fiat factories. During August and September 1919 new elections for an “internal commission” (a sort of collaborationist factory committee set up by a collective convention in 1906 for the purpose of better integrating the workers) suddenly provided the opportunity, amid the social crisis that was then sweeping Italy, for a complete transformation of the role of these “commissioners.” They began to federate among themselves as direct representatives of the workers. By October 30,000 workers were represented at an assembly of “executive committees of factory councils,” which resembled more an assembly of shop stewards (with one commissioner elected by each workshop) than an organization of councils in the strict sense. But the example nevertheless acted as a catalyst and the movement radicalized, supported by a fraction of the Socialist Party (including Gramsci) that was in the majority in Turin and by the Piedmont anarchists (see Pier Carlo Masini’s pamphlet, *Anarchici e comunisti nel movimento dei Consigli a Torino*). The movement was resisted by the majority of the Socialist Party and by the unions. On 15 March 1920 the councils began a strike combined with occupation of the factories and resumed production under their own control. By April 14 the strike was general in Piedmont; in the following days it spread through much of northern Italy, particularly among the dockers and railroad workers. The government

conveniently incapable of tolerating this economic reformism, despite the fact that it had no trouble tolerating the legalistic political expressions of the same reformism. The social democrats’ scientific ideology confidently affirmed that capitalism could not tolerate these economic antagonisms; but history repeatedly proved them wrong.

## 97

Bernstein, the social democrat least attached to political ideology and most openly attached to the methodology of bourgeois science, was honest enough to point out this contradiction (a contradiction which had also been implied by the reformist movement of the English workers, who never bothered to invoke any revolutionary ideology). But it was historical development itself which ultimately provided the definitive demonstration. Although full of illusions in other regards, Bernstein had denied that a crisis of capitalist production would miraculously force the hand of the socialists, who wanted to inherit the revolution only by way of this orthodox sequence of events. The profound social upheaval touched off by World War I, though it led to a widespread awakening of radical consciousness, twice demonstrated that the social-democratic hierarchy had failed to provide the German workers with a revolutionary education capable of turning them into theorists: first, when the overwhelming majority of the party rallied to the imperialist war; then, following the German defeat, when the party crushed the Spartakist revolutionaries. The ex-worker Ebert, who had become one of the social-democratic leaders, apparently still believed in sin since he admitted that he hated revolution “like sin.” And he proved himself a fitting precursor of the socialist representation that was soon to emerge as the mortal enemy of the proletariat in Russia and elsewhere, when he accurately summed up the essence of this new form of alienation: “Socialism means working a lot.”

## 98

As a Marxist thinker, Lenin was simply a faithful and consistent Kautskyist who applied the revolutionary ideology of “orthodox Marxism” within the conditions existing in Russia, conditions which did not lend themselves to the reformist practice carried on elsewhere by the Second International. In the Russian context, the Bolshevik practice of directing the proletariat from outside, by means of a disciplined underground party under the control of intellectuals who had become “professional revolutionaries,” became a new profession — a profession which refused to come to terms with any of the professional ruling strata of capitalist society (the Czarist political regime was in any case incapable of offering any opportunities for such compromise, which depends on an advanced stage of bourgeois power). As a result of this intransigence, the Bolsheviks ended up becoming the sole practitioners of the profession of totalitarian social domination.

With the war and the collapse of international social democracy in the face of that war, the authoritarian ideological radicalism of the Bolsheviks was able to spread its influence all over the world. The bloody end of the democratic illusions of the workers movement transformed the entire world into a Russia, and Bolshevism, reigning over the first revolutionary breakthrough engendered by this period of crisis, offered its hierarchical and ideological model to the proletariat of all countries, urging them to adopt it in order to “speak Russian” to their own ruling classes. Lenin did not reproach the Marxism of the Second International for being a revolutionary ideology, but for ceasing to be a revolutionary ideology.

## 100

The historical moment when Bolshevism triumphed for itself in Russia and social democracy fought victoriously for the old world marks the inauguration of the state of affairs that is at the heart of the modern spectacle’s domination: the representation of the working class has become an enemy of the working class.

## 101

“In all previous revolutions,” wrote Rosa Luxemburg in *Die Rote Fahne* of 21 December 1918, “the combatants faced each other openly and directly — class against class, program against program. In the present revolution, the troops protecting the old order are not fighting under the insignia of the ruling class, but under the banner of a ‘social-democratic party.’ If the central question of revolution was posed openly and honestly — Capitalism or socialism? — the great mass of the proletariat would today have no doubts or hesitations.” Thus, a few days before its destruction, the radical current of the German proletariat discovered the secret of the new conditions engendered by the whole process that had gone before (a development to which the representation of the working class had greatly contributed): the spectacular organization of the ruling order’s defense, the social reign of appearances where no “central question” can any longer be posed “openly and honestly.” The revolutionary representation of the proletariat had at this stage become both the primary cause and the central result of the general falsification of society.

## 102

The organization of the proletariat in accordance with the Bolshevik model resulted from the backwardness of Russia and from the abandonment of revolutionary struggle by the workers movements of the advanced countries.

council’s ultimate tendency appears negatively in the limits and illusions which have marked its first manifestations and which have caused its defeat quite as much as has the immediate and uncompromising struggle that is naturally waged against it by the ruling class. The purpose of the council form is the practical unification of proletarians in the process of appropriating the material and intellectual means of changing all existing conditions and making themselves the masters of their own history. It can and must be the organization in acts of historical consciousness. But in fact it has nowhere yet succeeded in overcoming the separation embodied in specialized political organizations and in the forms of ideological false consciousness that they produce and defend. Moreover, although it is quite natural that the councils that have been major agents of revolutionary situations have generally been councils of delegates, since it is such councils which coordinate and federate the decisions of local councils, it nevertheless appears that the general assemblies of the rank and file have almost always been considered as mere assemblies of electors, so that the first level of the “council” is situated above them. Here already lies an element of separation, which can only be surmounted by treating local general assemblies of all the proletarians in revolution as the ultimate, fundamental councils, from which any delegation must derive its power.

Leaving aside the precouncilist features of the Paris Commune that so enthused Marx (“the finally discovered political form through which the economic emancipation of labor can be realized”) — features which, moreover, can be seen more in the organization of the Central Committee of the National Guard, which was composed of delegates of the Parisian proletariat in arms, than in the elected Commune — the famous St. Petersburg “Council of Workers’ Deputies” was the first fledgling manifestation of an organization of the proletariat in a revolutionary situation. According to the figures given by Trotsky in his book 1905, 200,000 workers sent their delegates to the St. Petersburg Soviet; but its influence extended far beyond its immediate area, with many other councils in Russia drawing inspiration from its deliberations and decisions. It directly grouped the workers from more than 150 enterprises, besides welcoming representatives from 16 unions that had rallied to it. Its first nucleus was formed on October 13; by the 17th the soviet had established an Executive Committee over itself which Trotsky says “served it as a ministry.” Out of a total of 562 delegates, the Executive Committee comprised only 31 members, of which 22 were actually workers delegated by the entirety of the workers in their enterprises and 9 represented three revolutionary parties (Mensheviks, Bolsheviks and Social Revolutionaries); however, “the representatives of the parties had only consultative status and were not entitled to vote.” Although the rank-and-file assemblies were presumably faithfully represented by their revocable delegates, it is clear that those delegates had abdicated a large part of their power, in a very parliamentary way, into the hands of an Executive

# Preliminaries on Councils and Councilist Organization

by René Riesel (1969)

*“The Workers and Peasants Government has decreed that Kronstadt and the rebelling ships must immediately submit to the authority of the Soviet Republic. I therefore order all who have revolted against the socialist fatherland to lay down their arms at once. Recalcitrants should be disarmed and turned over to the Soviet authorities. The commissars and other members of the government who have been arrested must be liberated at once. Only those who surrender unconditionally can expect mercy from the Soviet Republic. I am simultaneously giving orders to prepare for the suppression of the rebellion and the subjugation of the sailors by armed force. All responsibility for the harm that may be suffered by the peaceful population will rest entirely on the heads of the White Guard mutineers. This warning is final.”*

—Trotsky, Kamenev, Ultimatum to Kronstadt

*“We have only one answer to all that: All power to the soviets! Take your hands off them — your hands that are red with the blood of the martyrs of freedom who fought the White Guards, the landowners and the bourgeoisie!”*

—Kronstadt Izvestia #6

During the fifty years since the Leninists reduced communism to electrification, since the Bolshevik counterrevolution erected the Soviet State over the dead body of the power of the soviets, and since “soviet” ceased to mean council, revolutions have continued to fling the Kronstadt demand in the face of the rulers of the Kremlin: “All power to the soviets and not to the parties.” The remarkable persistence of the real tendency toward workers councils throughout this half-century of efforts and repeated suppressions of the modern proletarian movement now imposes the councils on the new revolutionary current as the sole form of antistate dictatorship of the proletariat, as the sole tribunal that will be able to pass judgment on the old world and carry out the sentence itself.

The essence of the councils must be more precisely delineated, not only by refuting the gross falsifications propagated by social democracy, the Russian bureaucracy, Titoism and even Ben-Bellaism, but above all by recognizing the insufficiencies in the fledgling practical experiences of the power of the councils that have briefly appeared so far; as well, of course, as the insufficiencies in councilist revolutionaries’ very conceptions. The

These same backward conditions also tended to foster the counterrevolutionary aspects which that form of organization had unconsciously contained from its inception. The repeated failure of the mass of the European workers movement to take advantage of the golden opportunities of the 1918-1920 period (a failure which included the violent destruction of its own radical minority) favored the consolidation of the Bolshevik development and enabled that fraudulent outcome to present itself to the world as the only possible proletarian solution. By seizing a state monopoly as sole representative and defender of working-class power, the Bolshevik Party justified itself and became what it already was: the party of the owners of the proletariat, owners who essentially eliminated earlier forms of property.

## 103

For twenty years the various tendencies of Russian social democracy had engaged in an unresolved debate over all the conditions that might bear on the overthrow of Czarism — the weakness of the bourgeoisie; the preponderance of the peasant majority; and the potentially decisive role of a proletariat which was concentrated and combative but which constituted only a small minority of the population. This debate was eventually resolved in practice by a factor that had not figured in any of the hypotheses: a revolutionary bureaucracy that placed itself at the head of the proletariat, seized state power, and proceeded to impose a new form of class domination. A strictly bourgeois revolution had been impossible; talk of a “democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants” was meaningless verbiage; and the proletarian power of the soviets could not simultaneously maintain itself against the class of small landowners, against the national and international White reaction, and against its own representation which had become externalized and alienated in the form of a working-class party that maintained total control over the state, the economy, the means of expression, and soon even over people’s thoughts. Trotsky’s and Parvus’s theory of permanent revolution, which Lenin adopted in April 1917, was the only theory that proved true for countries with underdeveloped bourgeoisies; but even there it became true only after the unknown factor of bureaucratic class power came into the picture. In the numerous arguments within the Bolshevik leadership, Lenin was the most consistent advocate of concentrating dictatorial power in the hands of this supreme ideological representation. Lenin was right every time in the sense that he invariably supported the solution implied by earlier choices of the minority that now exercised absolute power: the democracy that was kept from peasants by means of the state would have to be kept from workers as well, which led to denying it to Communist union leaders and to party members in general, and finally to the highest ranks of the party hierarchy. At the Tenth Congress, as the Kronstadt soviet was being crushed by arms and buried under a barrage of slander, Lenin attacked the radical bureaucrats who had formed a “Workers’

Opposition” faction with the following ultimatum, the logic of which Stalin would later extend to an absolute division of the world: “You can stand here with us, or against us out there with a gun in your hand, but not within some opposition. . . . We’ve had enough opposition.”

#### 104

After Kronstadt, the bureaucracy consolidated its power as sole owner of a system of state capitalism — internally by means of a temporary alliance with the peasantry (the “New Economic Policy”) and externally by using the workers regimented into the bureaucratic parties of the Third International as a backup force for Russian diplomacy, sabotaging the entire revolutionary movement and supporting bourgeois governments whose support it in turn hoped to secure in the sphere of international politics (the Kuomintang regime in the China of 1925-27, the Popular Fronts in Spain and France, etc.). The Russian bureaucracy then carried this consolidation of power to the next stage by subjecting the peasantry to a reign of terror, implementing the most brutal primitive accumulation of capital in history. The industrialization of the Stalin era revealed the bureaucracy’s ultimate function: continuing the reign of the economy by preserving the essence of market society: commodified labor. It also demonstrated the independence of the economy: the economy has come to dominate society so completely that it has proved capable of recreating the class domination it needs for its own continued operation; that is, the bourgeoisie has created an independent power that is capable of maintaining itself even without a bourgeoisie. The totalitarian bureaucracy was not “the last owning class in history” in Bruno Rizzi’s sense; it was merely a substitute ruling class for the commodity economy. A tottering capitalist property system was replaced by a cruder version of itself — simplified, less diversified, and concentrated as the collective property of the bureaucratic class. This underdeveloped type of ruling class is also a reflection of economic underdevelopment, and it has no agenda beyond overcoming this underdevelopment in certain regions of the world. The hierarchical and statist framework for this crude remake of the capitalist ruling class was provided by the working-class party, which was itself modeled on the hierarchical separations of bourgeois organizations. As Ante Ciliga noted while in one of Stalin’s prisons, “Technical questions of organization turned out to be social questions” (Lenin and the Revolution).

#### 105

Leninism was the highest voluntaristic expression of revolutionary ideology; it was a coherence of the separate, governing a reality that resisted it. With the advent of Stalinism, revolutionary ideology returned to its fundamental incoherence. At that point, ideology was no longer a weapon, it had become

#### 121

A revolutionary organization must constitute an integral critique of society, that is, it must make a comprehensive critique of all aspects of alienated social life while refusing to compromise with any form of separate power anywhere in the world. In the organization’s struggle with class society, the combatants themselves are the fundamental weapons: a revolutionary organization must thus see to it that the dominant society’s conditions of separation and hierarchy are not reproduced within itself. It must constantly struggle against its deformation by the ruling spectacle. The only limit to participation in its total democracy is that each of its members must have recognized and appropriated the coherence of the organization’s critique — a coherence that must be demonstrated both in the critical theory as such and in the relation between that theory and practical activity.

#### 122

As capitalism’s ever-intensifying imposition of alienation at all levels makes it increasingly hard for workers to recognize and name their own impoverishment, putting them in the position of having to reject that impoverishment in its totality or not at all, revolutionary organization has had to learn that it can no longer combat alienation by means of alienated forms of struggle.

#### 123

Proletarian revolution depends entirely on the condition that, for the first time, theory as understanding of human practice be recognized and lived by the masses. It requires that workers become dialecticians and put their thought into practice. It thus demands of its “people without qualities” more than the bourgeois revolution demanded of the qualified individuals it delegated to carry out its tasks (because the partial ideological consciousness created by a segment of the bourgeois class was based on the economy, that central part of social life in which that class was already in power). The development of class society to the stage of the spectacular organization of nonlife is thus leading the revolutionary project to become visibly what it has always been in essence.

#### 124

Revolutionary theory is now the enemy of all revolutionary ideology, and it knows it.



is the terrain where the objective preconditions of historical consciousness are brought together — the terrain where active direct communication is realized, marking the end of specialization, hierarchy and separation, and the transformation of existing conditions into “conditions of unity.” In this process proletarian subjects can emerge from their struggle against their contemplative position; their consciousness is equal to the practical organization they have chosen for themselves because this consciousness has become inseparable from coherent intervention in history.

### 117

With the power of the councils — a power that must internationally supplant all other forms of power — the proletarian movement becomes its own product. This product is nothing other than the producers themselves, whose goal has become nothing other than their own fulfillment. Only in this way can the spectacle’s negation of life be negated in its turn.

### 118

The appearance of workers councils during the first quarter of this century was the most advanced expression of the old proletarian movement, but it went unnoticed, except in travestied forms, because it was repressed and destroyed along with all the rest of the movement. Now, from the vantage point of the new stage of proletarian critique, the councils can be seen in their true light as the only undefeated aspect of a defeated movement. The historical consciousness that recognizes that the councils are the only terrain in which it can thrive can now see that they are no longer at the periphery of a movement that is subsiding, but at the center of a movement that is rising.

### 119

A revolutionary organization that exists before the establishment of the power of workers councils must discover its own appropriate form through struggle; but all these historical experiences have already made it clear that it cannot claim to represent the working class. Its task, rather, is to embody a radical separation from the world of separation.

### 120

Revolutionary organization is the coherent expression of the theory of praxis entering into two-way communication with practical struggles, in the process of becoming practical theory. Its own practice is to foster the communication and coherence of these struggles. At the revolutionary moment when social separations are dissolved, the organization must dissolve itself as a separate organization.

an end in itself. But a lie that can no longer be challenged becomes insane. The totalitarian ideological pronouncement obliterates reality as well as purpose; nothing exists but what it says exists. Although this crude form of the spectacle has been confined to certain underdeveloped regions, it has nevertheless played an essential role in the spectacle’s global development. This particular materialization of ideology did not transform the world economically, as did advanced capitalism; it simply used police-state methods to transform people’s perception of the world.

### 106

The ruling totalitarian-ideological class is the ruler of a world turned upside down. The more powerful the class, the more it claims not to exist, and its power is employed above all to enforce this claim. It is modest only on this one point, however, because this officially nonexistent bureaucracy simultaneously attributes the crowning achievements of history to its own infallible leadership. Though its existence is everywhere in evidence, the bureaucracy must be invisible as a class. As a result, all social life becomes insane. The social organization of total falsehood stems from this fundamental contradiction.

### 107

Stalinism was also a reign of terror within the bureaucratic class. The terrorism on which this class’s power was based inevitably came to strike the class itself, because this class had no juridical legitimacy, no legally recognized status as an owning class which could be extended to each of its members. Its ownership had to be masked because it was based on false consciousness. This false consciousness can maintain its total power only by means of a total reign of terror in which all real motives are ultimately obscured. The members of the ruling bureaucratic class have the right of ownership over society only collectively, as participants in a fundamental lie: they have to play the role of the proletariat governing a socialist society; they have to be actors faithful to a script of ideological betrayal. Yet they cannot actually participate in this counterfeit entity unless their legitimacy is validated. No bureaucrat can individually assert his right to power, because to prove himself a socialist proletarian he would have to demonstrate that he was the opposite of a bureaucrat, while to prove himself a bureaucrat is impossible because the bureaucracy’s official line is that there is no bureaucracy. Each bureaucrat is thus totally dependent on the central seal of legitimacy provided by the ruling ideology, which validates the collective participation in its “socialist regime” of all the bureaucrats it does not liquidate. Although the bureaucrats are collectively empowered to make all social decisions, the cohesion of their own class can be ensured only by the concentration of their terrorist

power in a single person. In this person resides the only practical truth of the ruling lie: the power to determine an unchallengeable boundary line which is nevertheless constantly being adjusted. Stalin decides without appeal who is and who is not a member of the ruling bureaucracy — who should be considered a “proletarian in power” and who branded “a traitor in the pay of Wall Street and the Mikado.” The atomized bureaucrats can find their collective legitimacy only in the person of Stalin — the lord of the world who thus comes to see himself as the absolute person, for whom no superior spirit exists. “The lord of the world recognizes his own nature — omnipresent power — through the destructive violence he exerts against the contrastingly powerless selfhood of his subjects.” He is the power that defines the terrain of domination, and he is also “the power that ravages that terrain.”

### 108

When ideology has become total through its possession of total power, and has changed from partial truth to totalitarian falsehood, historical thought has been so totally annihilated that history itself, even at the level of the most empirical knowledge, can no longer exist. Totalitarian bureaucratic society lives in a perpetual present in which whatever has previously happened is determined solely by its police. The project already envisioned by Napoleon of “monarchically controlling memory” has been realized in Stalinism’s constant rewriting of the past, which alters not only the interpretations of past events but even the events themselves. But the price paid for this liberation from all historical reality is the loss of the rational frame of reference that is indispensable to capitalism as a historical social system. It is well known how much the scientific application of an ideology gone mad has cost the Russian economy (one need only recall the Lysenko fiasco). This contradiction — the fact that a totalitarian bureaucracy trying to administer an industrialized society is caught between its need for rationality and its repression of rationality — is also one of its main weaknesses in comparison with normal capitalist development. Just as the bureaucracy cannot resolve the question of agriculture as ordinary capitalism has done, it also proves inferior to the latter in the field of industrial production, because its unrealistic authoritarian planning is based on omnipresent falsifications.

### 109

Between the two world wars the revolutionary working-class movement was destroyed by the joint action of the Stalinist bureaucracy and of fascist totalitarianism (the latter’s organizational form having been inspired by the totalitarian party that had first been tested and developed in Russia). Fascism was a desperate attempt to defend the bourgeois economy from the dual threat of crisis and proletarian subversion, a state of siege in which capitalist society saved itself by giving itself an emergency dose of rationalization in the form

had created in the effort to liberate itself, it also discovers through concrete historical experience that it is the class that must totally oppose all rigidified externalizations and all specializations of power. It bears a revolution that cannot leave anything outside itself, a revolution embodying the permanent domination of the present over the past and a total critique of separation; and it must discover the appropriate forms of action to carry out this revolution. No quantitative amelioration of its impoverishment, no illusory participation in a hierarchized system, can provide a lasting cure for its dissatisfaction, because the proletariat cannot truly recognize itself in any particular wrong it has suffered, nor in the righting of any particular wrong. It cannot recognize itself even in the righting of many such wrongs, but only in the righting of the absolute wrong of being excluded from any real life.

### 115

New signs of negation are proliferating in the most economically advanced countries. Although these signs are misunderstood and falsified by the spectacle, they are sufficient proof that a new period has begun. We have already seen the failure of the first proletarian assault against capitalism; now we are witnessing the failure of capitalist abundance. On one hand, anti-union struggles of Western workers are being repressed first of all by the unions; on the other, rebellious youth are raising new protests, protests which are still vague and confused but which clearly imply a rejection of art, of everyday life, and of the old specialized politics. These are two sides of a new spontaneous struggle that is at first taking on a criminal appearance. They foreshadow a second proletarian assault against class society. As the lost children of this as yet immobile army reappear on this battleground — a battleground which has changed and yet remains the same — they are following a new “General Ludd” who, this time, urges them to attack the machinery of permitted consumption.

### 116

“The long-sought political form through which the working class could carry out its own economic liberation” has taken on a clear shape in this century, in the form of revolutionary workers councils which assume all decisionmaking and executive powers and which federate with each other by means of delegates who are answerable to their base and revocable at any moment. The councils that have actually emerged have as yet provided no more than a rough hint of their possibilities because they have immediately been opposed and defeated by class society’s various defensive forces, among which their own false consciousness must often be included. As Pannekoek rightly stressed, opting for the power of workers councils “poses problems” rather than providing a solution. But it is precisely within this form of social organization that the problems of proletarian revolution can find their real solution. This

seized by army officers, as happened in Egypt. In other situations, such as the aftermath of the Algerian war of independence, a bureaucracy that has established itself as a para-state authority in the course of struggle may seek a stabilizing compromise by merging with a weak national bourgeoisie. Finally, in the former colonies of black Africa that remain openly tied to the American and European bourgeoisie, a local bourgeoisie constitutes itself (usually based on the power of traditional tribal chiefs) through its possession of the state. Foreign imperialism remains the real master of the economy of these countries, but at a certain stage its native agents are rewarded for their sale of local products by being granted possession of a local state — a state that is independent from the local masses but not from imperialism. Incapable of accumulating capital, this artificial bourgeoisie does nothing but squander the surplus value it extracts from local labor and the subsidies it receives from protector states and international monopolies. Because of the obvious inability of these bourgeois classes to fulfill the normal economic functions of a bourgeoisie, they soon find themselves challenged by oppositional movements based on the bureaucratic model (more or less adapted to particular local conditions). But if such bureaucracies succeed in their fundamental project of industrialization, they produce the historical conditions for their own defeat: by accumulating capital they also accumulate a proletariat, thus creating their own negation in countries where that negation had not previously existed.

#### 114

In the course of this complex and terrible evolution which has brought the era of class struggles to a new set of conditions, the proletariat of the industrial countries has lost its ability to assert its own independent perspective. In a fundamental sense, it has also lost its illusions. But it has not lost its being. The proletariat has not been eliminated. It remains irreducibly present within the intensified alienation of modern capitalism. It consists of that vast majority of workers who have lost all power over their lives and who, once they become aware of this, redefine themselves as the proletariat, the force working to negate this society from within. This proletariat is being objectively reinforced by the virtual elimination of the peasantry and by the increasing degree to which the “service” sectors and intellectual professions are being subjected to factorylike working conditions. Subjectively, however, this proletariat is still far removed from any practical class consciousness, and this goes not only for white-collar workers but also for blue-collar workers, who have yet to become aware of any perspective beyond the impotence and mystifications of the old politics. But when the proletariat discovers that its own externalized power contributes to the constant reinforcement of capitalist society, no longer only in the form of its alienated labor but also in the form of the trade unions, political parties, and state powers that it

of massive state intervention. But this rationalization is hampered by the extreme irrationality of its methods. Although fascism rallies to the defense of the main icons of a bourgeois ideology that has become conservative (family, private property, moral order, patriotism), while mobilizing the petty bourgeoisie and the unemployed workers who are panic-stricken by economic crisis or disillusioned by the socialist movement’s failure to bring about a revolution, it is not itself fundamentally ideological. It presents itself as what it is — a violent resurrection of myth calling for participation in a community defined by archaic pseudovalues: race, blood, leader. Fascism is a technologically equipped primitivism. Its factitious mythological rehashes are presented in the spectacular context of the most modern means of conditioning and illusion. It is thus a significant factor in the formation of the modern spectacle, and its role in the destruction of the old working-class movement also makes it one of the founding forces of present-day society. But since it is also the most costly method of preserving the capitalist order, it has generally ended up being replaced by the major capitalist states, which represent stronger and more rational forms of that order.

#### 110

When the Russian bureaucracy has finally succeeded in doing away with the vestiges of bourgeois property that hampered its rule over the economy, and in developing this economy for its own purposes, and in being recognized as a member of the club of great powers, it wants to enjoy its world in peace and to disencumber itself from the arbitrariness to which it is still subjected. It thus denounces the Stalinism at its origin. But this denunciation remains Stalinist — arbitrary, unexplained, and subject to continual modification—because the ideological lie at its origin can never be revealed. The bureaucracy cannot liberalize itself either culturally or politically because its existence as a class depends on its ideological monopoly, which, for all its cumbersomeness, is its sole title to power. This ideology has lost the passion of its original expression, but its passionless routinization still has the repressive function of controlling all thought and prohibiting any competition whatsoever. The bureaucracy is thus helplessly tied to an ideology that is no longer believed by anyone. The power that used to inspire terror now inspires ridicule, but this ridiculed power still defends itself with the threat of resorting to the terrorizing force it would like to be rid of. Thus, at the very time when the bureaucracy hopes to demonstrate its superiority on the terrain of capitalism it reveals itself to be a poor cousin of capitalism. Just as its actual history contradicts its façade of legality and its crudely maintained ignorance contradicts its scientific pretensions, so its attempt to vie with the bourgeoisie in the production of commodity abundance is stymied by the fact that such abundance contains its own implicit ideology, and is generally accompanied by the freedom to choose from an unlimited range of spectacular pseudoalternatives—a pseudofreedom that remains incompatible with the bureaucracy’s ideology.

The bureaucracy's ideological title to power is already collapsing at the international level. The power that established itself nationally in the name of an ostensibly internationalist perspective is now forced to recognize that it can no longer impose its system of lies beyond its own national borders. The unequal economic development of diverse bureaucracies with competing interests that have succeeded in establishing their own "socialism" in more than one country has led to an all-out public confrontation between the Russian lie and the Chinese lie. From this point on, each bureaucracy in power will have to find its own way; and the same is true for each of the totalitarian parties aspiring to such power (notably those that still survive from the Stalinist period among certain national working classes). This international collapse has been further aggravated by the expressions of internal negation which first became visible to the outside world when the workers of East Berlin revolted against the bureaucrats and demanded a "government of steel workers" — a negation which has in one case already gone to the point of sovereign workers councils in Hungary. But in the final analysis, this crumbling of the global alliance of pseudosocialist bureaucracies is also a most unfavorable development for the future of capitalist society. The bourgeoisie is in the process of losing the adversary that objectively supported it by providing an illusory unification of all opposition to the existing order. This division of labor between two mutually reinforcing forms of the spectacle comes to an end when the pseudorevolutionary role in turn divides. The spectacular component of the destruction of the worker-class movement is itself headed for destruction.

The only current partisans of the Leninist illusion are the various Trotskyist tendencies, which stubbornly persist in identifying the proletarian project with an ideologically based hierarchical organization despite all the historical experiences that have refuted that perspective. The distance that separates Trotskyism from a revolutionary critique of present-day society is related to the deferential distance the Trotskyists maintain regarding positions that were already mistaken when they were acted on in real struggles. Trotsky remained fundamentally loyal to the upper bureaucracy until 1927, while striving to gain control of it so as to make it resume a genuinely Bolshevik foreign policy. (It is well known, for example, that in order to help conceal Lenin's famous "Testament" he went so far as to slanderously disavow his own supporter Max Eastman, who had made it public.) Trotsky was doomed by his basic perspective, because once the bureaucracy became aware that it had evolved into a counterrevolutionary class on the domestic front, it was bound to opt for a similarly counterrevolutionary role in other countries (though still, of course, in the name of revolution). Trotsky's subsequent efforts to create a

Fourth International reflect the same inconsistency. Once he had become an unconditional partisan of the Bolshevik form of organization (which he did during the second Russian revolution), he refused for the rest of his life to recognize that the bureaucracy was a new ruling class. When Lukács, in 1923, presented this same organizational form as the long-sought link between theory and practice, in which proletarians cease being mere "spectators" of the events that occur in their organization and begin consciously choosing and experiencing those events, he was describing as merits of the Bolshevik Party everything that that party was not. Despite his profound theoretical work, Lukács remained an ideologue, speaking in the name of the power that was most grossly alien to the proletarian movement, yet believing and giving his audience to believe that he found himself completely at home with it. As subsequent events demonstrated how that power disavows and suppresses its lackeys, Lukács's endless self-repudiations revealed with caricatural clarity that he had identified with the total opposite of himself and of everything he had argued for in *History and Class Consciousness*. No one better than Lukács illustrates the validity of the fundamental rule for assessing all the intellectuals of this century: What they respect is a precise gauge of their own degradation. Yet Lenin had hardly encouraged these sorts of illusions about his activities. On the contrary, he acknowledged that "a political party cannot examine its members to see if there are contradictions between their philosophy and the party program." The party whose idealized portrait Lukács had so inopportunistically drawn was in reality suited for only one very specific and limited task: the seizure of state power.

Since the neo-Leninist illusion carried on by present-day Trotskyism is constantly being contradicted by the reality of modern capitalist societies (both bourgeois and bureaucratic), it is not surprising that it gets its most favorable reception in the nominally independent "underdeveloped" countries, where the local ruling classes' versions of bureaucratic state socialism end up amounting to little more than a mere ideology of economic development. The hybrid composition of these ruling classes is more or less clearly related to their position within the bourgeois-bureaucratic spectrum. Their international maneuvering between those two poles of capitalist power, along with their numerous ideological compromises (notably with Islam) stemming from their heterogeneous social bases, end up removing from these degraded versions of ideological socialism everything serious except the police. One type of bureaucracy establishes itself by forging an organization capable of combining national struggle with agrarian peasant revolt; it then, as in China, tends to apply the Stalinist model of industrialization in societies that are even less developed than Russia was in 1917. A bureaucracy able to industrialize the nation may also develop out of the petty bourgeoisie, with power being