

# re-collecting our past

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# re-collecting our past

« One cannot transform capitalist terrain into proletarian terrain »  
*Octobre*, N° 4, April 1938.

Most of this issue of *La Banquise* is devoted to a summary of the modern revolutionary movement. Summing up the past, including the recent past, and taking soundings of the contemporary period in order to recognise some of its basic tendencies, is essential in order to know who and where we are. You will only find *an* assessment here, not *the* complete global summing up which will only be possible after the world revolution. Each revolutionary grouping can only take stock by starting from its own position, formation and particular experience. This text is not a group introspection, nor is it an assertion of general principles and movements which we pretend to describe as a whole, instead it seeks to be both universal in its basis, through the aspirations and struggles of which it is the product, and also particular, because its authors participated in the world communist movement in specific places and circumstances. It would be wrong, not to say untrue, to believe and to instil belief in an absolute summing up : like every revolutionary group we have a relative position and activity within the totality of a social movement, that is expressed and influenced, but not created, by collective efforts such as ours.

It is obvious, for example, that a revolutionary who has come from anarchism would have conceived this assessment differently. He might arrive at similar conclusions, however his trajectory would be different. But just like us he would not have made Marx and the communist left into a dead end.

On the other hand, we haven't written about everything that we consider important. The essential consideration was to deal with the things which have formed us, but this does not mean that the contribution of other critiques which are only mentioned or passed over in silence has been negligible. For the same reason, to deal with our relations with *la Guerre Sociale* and the Faurisson affair in a merely allusive way, would have been unacceptable and absurd.

Fundamentally, the connecting thread of this text is the relation between capitalism and the human activity from which, without ever entirely exhausting it, it draws its dynamism. The proletarian movement is neither based on feelings, nor on the hope that one day capitalism will become *truly* unbearable. Revolt « with a human title », universal and non-categorical, is certainly born from a limit of Capital, one which is expressed amongst other things in economic crises, but which cannot be reduced to them. Capital doesn't find its limit in absolute misery, or in the loss of the sense of life, but in the difficulties it has in absorbing the energy of living labour, of the proletarian. While these difficulties appear above all within the organisation of work, they are also felt in the proletarian's whole life, especially as Capital has colonized the conditions of the reproduction of life.

It is in those periods when new forms of the integration of labour by Capital are installed – in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, around 1914-18, and at the present time – that the critique of the *basis* of capitalism, rather than of its inevitable but secondary *consequences*, becomes possible. More exactly, in such periods, critique can rise from effects (poverty, unemployment, repression, etc.) to their cause :

dispossession by the market and wage labour.

Where can a society go which is based on work and yet which makes it impossible ? To take shelter from the social consequences of the crisis (unruly unemployed), it creates something which is an anomaly, if not an absurdity, in terms of its own logic : it gives a wage (« social » and not « productive ») without any equivalent work, a kind of insurance, a little like the way in which it (badly) pays the disabled and the elderly. Capital undermines its own coherence when non-work pays, albeit less than work does, but in the same manner. Similarly, the collective character of labour removes any sense of remuneration for personal effort. The individual wage is no longer anything except an instrument for dividing workers, whereas formerly individual wage negotiations responded to real differences in the work they provided. In all of this, as in automation, wage labour remains whereas work quite simply becomes, not superfluous, but inessential in a large part of society and of production. We are at the stage, already described by Marx, where all individual workers participate in the production of value.

The struggles of unskilled workers, disputes in the space outside work, the refusal of work, (in which the left and leftism only see reactions, the consequences of exploitation), all contain something which confronts those things which future revolutionaries will dissolve, because these movements come up against (without being able to overthrow it) that which capitalises human activity.

The reduction of everything to the minimum time necessary to accomplish it, the accumulation of small blocks of crystallised time, this is the domination of value. We devote the shortest time to the production of things, and in the same way, to each act of life. We thus produce objects incorporating the least possible time. The life of proletarians is subjected to this search for productivity, to the point that they partially internalise it. The secret and the madness of valorisation consists in always trying to obtain more from less, a maximum from a minimum. Something that is impossible, but which seems accessible by means of technology incorporating an accumulation of past labour, and turned into value by as small a living labour as possible.

On the way what becomes of the person who provides this living labour ? In his life he knows the limit-experience of exhaustion which, in a different context, Capital forces the earth to undergo. In the factory as in the field, the obsession with productivity runs up against the same limitation : the conditions which it must meet, in order to constantly reduce the socially necessary labour time for the production of goods, turn against it. When we say that in twenty years, output per hectare has doubled or tripled, we forget that this increase presupposes raw materials and energy. In the United States the relation between the energy harvested in the form of grain and the energy given to its production was quantified. Setting aside prices, « the valorisation of the energy invested in 1970 was no more than 3/4 of what it had been in 1945 ». (*L'Année économique et sociale 1978, Le Monde, 1979, p. 158.*)

Like the fall in industrial profitability, decreasing agricultural outputs are not insurmountable. But the solution depends on the social balance of power. While the earth only opposes its inertia to valorisation, proletarians are the active means for it and its critical threshold. The crisis of valorisation, which is simultaneously both cause and effect of action-reaction by proletarians, opens the possibility of a break

with a society based on the systematic search for productivity.

Capitalism also finds itself in an open situation, which it dreams of filling by means of technology. Machine automation combines tools and programming. But the *software* remains separate from the *hardware*, the « programme » is distinct from the purely mechanical and (re)programmable part. The robot is typical of a world where to make and to learn, to do and to direct, are kept as distinct realities. The robot is a worker incorporating his boss. In spite of Taylor, man could not be made into a machine, so the aim is to make machines into living beings. Specialists in robotics constantly lapse into anthropomorphism : being simultaneously « arm », « eye », etc, the robot joins together body and head, muscles and intelligence. It is the ideal slave by which one measures « the degree of servitude ». A research project, one of whose creations was a machine for quadriplegics, was christened *Spartacus*. In this vision the robot is to become the prosthesis of a Capital that would be both disembodied, and freed from the harmful surplus of human activity, reducing the living being to an unavoidable but controlled pollution.

Our attempt at a summing up ends with the prospect (only a possibility) of an upheaval as significant as the industrialisation of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the appearance of a new system of production at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>. However it would be misleading to wait until proletarians simply revolted against the forward march of a system which crushes them. Big social movements don't have a motor, and cannot be deemed equivalent, for example, to economic crisis or the disastrous effects of technological progress. They are set in motion by the contradictions of a universe revealing its faults and aberrations.

There is no guarantee that proletarians will profit from these contradictions to play their own hand in a crisis which perhaps will prove to be the transition to another form of production and of capitalist society. Our action is founded on the double conviction of the depth of present day contradictions, and of the lack of support, expressed ideologically, of workers for Capital, unlike the support the communist left had noted before the second world war or in 1944-5. *Class action*, that is to say those practises which link proletarians, advances matters inside heads through the durable cleavages it creates between proletarians and everything that sustains capitalism. But this proletarian experience is only revolutionary if it commits itself to ways of breaking with capitalist solutions.

It is not enough just to see that under the domination of Capital, which is capable of penetrating everything and of making durable workers organisation into one of its relays, the introduction of permanent mass structures by workers becomes an obstacle to the revolution. It is also necessary to wonder why. Today the mere *defence of the proletarian condition* is a dead end, an unrealisable path or a para-syndicalism. It is not a matter of dissolving the defence of workers living conditions into a tide of « new social movements », nor of making it the mainstay or face of these neo-reformisms. The difficulty today, in theory and especially in practise, comes from the fact that one can no longer demand anything, that is to say, anything that positively exists in this world, whether it be to defend it, to extend it or even less to transform it in a progressive, proletarian-friendly direction. This is why a revolutionary movement, and thus also groupings heralding communism, have such difficulty in emerging.

The revolution will not be the sum of different movements, each fighting in the

name of its own specificity, even while they give pride of place to a movement that would like to be of the workers. It won't juxtapose district committees, women's groups, environmentalist circles. . . even if these are overseen by factory councils. Each constituent part will not first of all deal with its own condition, instead it will combine into a whole that will not just change the school, the factory or the man-woman relation, but will change those things, money and wage relations, which lie at the root of everything, and thus will overthrow the sectors through which Capital has either created or maintained specialisation.

People are not wrong to affirm the global expansion of the class of wage workers (Simon Rubak, *Classes laborieuses et révolution*, Spartacus, 1979). But this enlargement is accompanied by a polarisation into two extremes both of which reveal themselves as traps. Workers in the developed countries (and recently in Poland : cf. our article in issue 1. of *La Banquise*) still see themselves too much in terms of a working class identity that is both archaic and capitalist. The hardest fought and longest strike in France since 1945 was that at the *Parisien Libéré* (1975-77), which simultaneously managed to be capitalist in its objective of maintaining such a newspaper, trade unionist in its almost total control by the CGT which turned it into a shop-window for its capacity for action, and yet which was radical in its methods (taking power over the newspaper, printing pirate editions, « rodeos » against scabs, etc.)

At the other extreme, in the third world, proletarianisation is often momentary, it does not unite around a common condition. The frequent absence of working class identity goes hand in hand with a lack of proletarian consciousness and practise. Where the workers of the developed countries endeavour to escape proletarianisation by confining themselves within their employment, if not their trade where they have a qualification, those of the third world try to escape proletarian status by making it a temporary phase of their existence.

It is never repression or the « pulverisation of the proletariat » which overcomes revolutionaries, but their inability to *understand* what happens and to *situate themselves* in relation to it. One of the principal causes of the current weakness of small radical groups, which at best pushes them towards a flight into activism, is our common difficulty in understanding the forms of present day proletarian experience, something we have less grasp of, than of the capitalist context which endeavours to incorporate it.

This self-understanding of a social movement necessarily remains partial. We will only look at one fragment of this movement, considered from a particular angle. We will speak above all about France. Not because it might have been the centre of a dynamic, but because we are obliged to speak about what we know best, and communism has only been strong enough to reach international dimensions for brief moments, quickly followed by a contraction of perspectives back to the national context.

« Once included into the production process of capital, however, the means of labour passes through a series of metamorphoses until it ends up as the machine, or rather as an automatic system of machinery (system of machinery; automatic merely means the most complete, most adequate form of machinery, and alone transforms machinery into a system). That system is set in motion by an automaton, self-moved motive power; this automaton consists of a large number of mechanical and intellectual organs, with the workers themselves cast in the role of merely conscious members of it. » (p. 82)

« (...) the necessary tendency of capital to increase the productive power of labour and to bring about the greatest possible negation of necessary labour. » (p. 83)

« In the same measure as labour time – the simple quantity of labour – is posited by capital as the sole determinant of value, immediate labour and its quantity disappear as the determining principle of production, of the creation of use values. It is reduced both quantitatively, in that its proportion declines, and qualitatively, in that it, though still indispensable, becomes a subaltern moment in comparison to general scientific work, the technological application of the natural sciences, on the one hand, and also in comparison to the general productive power originating from the organisation of society in overall production (...) Thus capital works to dissolve itself as the form which dominates production. » (p. 85-6)

« But in the degree in which large-scale industry develops, the creation of real wealth becomes less dependent upon labour time and the quantity of labour employed than upon the power of the agents set in motion during labour time. And their power – their POWERFUL EFFECTIVENESS – in turn bears no relation to the immediate labour time which their production costs (...) » (p. 90)

« Once this transformation has taken place, it is neither the immediate labour performed by man himself, nor the time for which he works, but the appropriation of his own general productive power, his comprehension of Nature and domination of it by virtue of his being a social entity – in a word, the development of the social individual – that appears as the cornerstone of production and wealth. The *theft of alien labour time, which is the basis of present wealth*, appears to be a miserable foundation compared to this newly developed one, the foundation created by large-scale industry itself. As soon as labour in its immediate form has ceased to be the great source of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and therefore exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value. The *surplus labour of the masses* has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the *non-labour of a few* has ceased to be the condition for the development of the general powers of the human mind. As a result, production based upon exchange value collapses, and the immediate material production process itself is stripped of its form of indigence and antagonism. » (p. 91)

« By striving to reduce labour time to a minimum, while, on the other hand, positing labour time as the sole measure and source of wealth, capital itself is a contradiction-in-process. It therefore diminishes labour time in the form of necessary labour time in order to increase it in the form of superfluous labour time; it thus posits superfluous labour time to an increasing degree as a condition – *question de vie et de mort* [A matter of life and death] – for necessary labour time. On the one hand, therefore, it calls into life all the powers of science and Nature, and of social combinations and social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth (relatively) independent of the labour time employed for that purpose. On the other

hand, it wishes the enormous social forces thus created to be measured by labour time and to confine them within the limits necessary to maintain as value the value already created. The productive forces and social relations – two different aspects of the development of the social individual – appear to capital merely as the means, and are merely the means, for it to carry on production on its restricted basis. IN FACT, however, they are the material conditions for exploding that basis. » (p. 91-92)

« *Labour time as the measure of wealth* posits wealth itself as based upon poverty, and DISPOSABLE TIME only as existing *in and through the opposition to surplus labour time*; or the whole time of an individual is posited as labour time, and he is consequently degraded to a mere labourer, subsumed under labour. Hence the most developed machinery now compels the labourer to work for a longer time than the savage does, or than the labourer himself did when he was using the simplest, crudest implements. (...) » (p. 94)

« Just as with the development of large-scale industry the basis on which it rests, appropriation of alien labour time, ceases to constitute or to create wealth, so, this development takes place, *immediate labour* as such ceases to be the basis of production. That happens because, on the one hand, immediate labour is transformed into a predominantly overseeing and regulating activity; and also because, on the other hand, the product ceases to be the product of isolated immediate labour, and it is rather the *combination* of social activity that appears as the producer. » (p. 94-95)

**Marx, 1857-58 Manuscripts (*Grundrisse*), Marx Engels Collected Works vol 29, International Publishers, 1987.**

« First, with the development of the *real subsumption of labour under capital*, or the *specifically capitalist mode of production*, the *real lever* of the overall labour process is increasingly not the individual worker. Instead, *labour-power socially combined* and the various competing labour-powers which together form the entire production machine participate in very different ways in the immediate process of making commodities, or, more accurately in this context, creating the product. Some work better with their hands, others with their heads, one as a manager, engineer, technologist, etc., the other as overseer, the third as manual labourer or even drudge. » )

**Marx, Results of the Immediate Process of Production. in *Capital I*, Penguin, 1976, pp. 1039-1040**

« The product is transformed from the direct product of the individual producer into a social product, the joint product of each collective labourer, i.e. a combination of workers, each of whom stands at a different distance from the actual manipulation of the object of labour. With the progressive accentuation of the co-operative character of the labour process, there necessarily occurs a progressive extension of the concept of progressive extension of the concept of productive labour, and of the concept of the bearer of that labour, the productive worker. In order to work productively, it is no longer necessary for the individual himself to put his hand to the object; it is sufficient for him to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform any one of its subordinate functions. »

**Marx, *Capital I*, Penguin, 1976, pp. 643-44.**

# **the Birth of Modern Communism**



re-collecting our past (2)  
the Birth of Modern Communism

## What Continuity ?

Whether or not they are our contemporaries, we could point to numerous, sometimes reciprocal, relationships between those groups and individuals which have made us what we are. It would be absurd to claim any organisational continuity. But might we not speak of an invariance, or at least a doctrinal thread ?

No eclectic revolutionary exists who can be content to take his inheritance just as he finds it. If today we read a profound thought which transforms us in the work of Flora Tristan, tomorrow a second in the work of Bakunin, later still a third in the work of Marx, this can only enrich us if their contributions form part of a coherence that is constructed and modified, but which still tends towards a unitary critique. It is pointless to reject eclecticism in the name of a doctrinal purity. Instead one rejects it almost naturally because a *communist movement* exists. Moreover it is the conviction of that existence which forms the difference between our « current », of which *La Banquise* is an aspect, and other revolutionaries. Beyond a historical clarification, this text will have achieved its aim if it illuminates what the communist movement is, its nature as well as its present day expressions.

Perhaps one day the human being will be a capitalised mutant. In the meantime, it is comforting to note that they still haven't succeeded in manufacturing such beings, and we doubt they ever will. As past and present history shows us, the human being is characterised, amongst other things, by the fact that he engages in activity with other beings. Through this relation, he transforms himself while transforming that which surrounds him. This is what distinguishes humanity from the « societies » of insects or of apes, etc. (See *La Banquise* no. 1 « *For a World without Moral Order* ».) The communist movement is the human tendency to make this activity and this relation the main element of human life, a theoretical and practical tendency which appears embryonically, without calling society into question, within elementary acts of solidarity and help, and at the level of society, through a revolutionary movement.

« The question of sovereignty thus leads straight to the communist organisation, and by the same token arouses all those questions which derive from the rational causes of the existence of a state of society... What is society ?... Society only exists due to the fact of the connection between men, putting in common their diverse faculties... consequently, its object is to use these forces, this collective power for the greatest good of all... » (*La Fraternité de 1845, 1847*)

99% of all known societies are based on man's exploitation by man, and on the oppression of groups by a dominant class, which interposes mediations between beings and their activity : the State, religion, politics, etc. Yet, this anticommunist world would not function without the human tendency towards communism, however diverted and degraded it is. One of the most alienated conditions of work is the need for activity, just as the necessity to act and to go beyond oneself enables the dispossession of yourself in religion, in politics and in art.

Communism is what one does and what one has in common with others. It is a

function necessary to all existence and to all action. Then, one will ask, does « communism » exist everywhere ? Yes. The communist movement is the *coherent* action and expression of this irresistible tendency, which helps to assure the triumph of what is common to humans, their being-together. Societies of exploitation play on this latent community and the need which everyone has for it, the need to act together, and on this basis they build up a string of small groups or individuals linked together, above all, by the intermediary of the state or the market. Gregariousness and individualism go hand in hand. Communism, on the contrary, is the need to be and to act together, but without abdicating your own autonomous existence and action.

The communist movement is thus, by nature, multiform and convergent. It doesn't fear doctrinal impurity. By contrast, the politician, himself, must be either inheritor or founder. For politics filiation poses an eternal problem. To regroup the separated it needs reference points, ancestors and founders. And conversely, in the work of the specialists in sceptical research, who need to seek without finding, a phobia for tradition imposes itself.

In the economy, just as in the life of societies, despite the importance of movements of long duration, for us the crucial moments are those where communism leaves its everyday phenomenological reality to emerge as an offensive social force. That was the case in the years before and after 1848 and after 1917, which constitute key periods in its history. In both cases however the proletariat did not go far enough forward to become unified and truly act *for themselves*. These intense periods remain no less decisive, in practise as well as « doctrinally ». On the other hand, the long phases which followed these breakdowns increased their dispersion – the theoretical fracturing corresponding to the disintegration of the movement. In 1933 the journal *Bilan* noted in its first issue that since 1923 « the vision of revolutionary development all over the world (...) is no longer unitary ».

Turning back to these two pivotal moments – 1848 and 1917 – is more than historical reminder. Summing up the debates which have animated the revolutionary movement since the sixties, they make it possible to see whether the open historical phase that has existed for about fifteen years could lead to another of these intense periods. What you will read about 1848 or 1917 also expresses the route travelled by an entire generation. Obviously we don't put Marx or the Russian revolution on the same level as la Vieille Taupe ! But its necessary to know what la Vieille Taupe thought about the Russian revolution in order to understand it, and to know what we think of Marx in order to understand us. This is not a matter of evaluating what we have borrowed from here or there, nor of weighing the pro's and con's. Revealing the limitations of a particular current counts for less than its overall movement and the depth of its contribution. Rather it is a question of showing how and why ideas, which in those periods were subversive, became transformed into ideology.

« (...) ideology is not constructed from the *errors* of the radical critique which gave birth to it, but from the historical truth which the latter will have brought out, or contributed to bringing out. » (*To finish with work and its world*, C.R.C.R.E no. 1, June 1982.)

## **Eighteen Forty-Eight**

Why constantly return to 1848 ? It is neither a matter of Eurocentrism, nor of contempt for the millennia which preceded the industrial era. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the communist movement was already present within natural, that is to say social, communities, and also within those artificial communities bonded together by religion or by a semi-religious utopia. **Moreover**, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was already a « working class ». At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is thought that the troops of Thomas Munzer primarily gathered together workers, weavers and miners living in cities. In the Hanseatic cities at the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Leyden about 1670 and in Paris in 1789, at least half of the population was made up of wage workers. It is estimated that there were 1.5 million textile workers in the south of Belgium and the north of France about 1795. While wage labourers were numerous in the urban centres, they were also found in the countryside. In short, society everywhere generated this vast layer of the uprooted and dispossessed, those whom Sully called « men of nothingness ».

In any case, a low level of « development of the productive forces » has never prevented the communisation of society. In those rare societies near to communism which can still be seen today, where exploitation, private property and coercive institutions are unknown, and where the environment doesn't pose a problem, material production is barely developed.

Whereas communism locates true wealth in the act of production itself, capitalism is animated by the need to produce. It considers the product before the process, and this chronological impossibility obliges it to organize itself in order to cheat time. For Capital, wealth is what one produces. In communism wealth is what one does, and thus what one is. *Doing* goes beyond the age-old alternative between « being » or « having », which has recently been made flavour of the month through theorizations of a *homo ludens* opposed to a *homo faber*. Doing is not just the action of the producer; it doesn't reduce intelligence to a mere tool; it consists of the multiplicity of possible activities, including doing nothing. Communist man is not afraid of wasting his time. Communism goes beyond separations and exists as continual self-creation : within it being is not one with what it does, and is not what it does, but is the direction, the future of what it does.

By reinterpreting history, capitalism has finished by making us believe that men have always wanted to enlarge surpluses and to increase productivity, whereas it is Capital which has created the need to save time and, in particular, to systematically reduce labour time. The primitive community was not dissolved on the day that it first produced an exchangeable surplus.

There was no threshold of growth beyond which the productive forces would have necessarily generated commodities, classes and the State. The deciding factor was social and not economic. In the same way, there is no threshold of the « abundance » created by Capital, which must be crossed in order to arrive at communism. The reason that capitalism can make it possible to pass on to communism is also social. Capitalism doesn't restrict itself to developing the forces of production, it also creates a mass of people who, at the right moment, have both

the need and the capacity to communise the world, to make common again everything which exists.

Those primitive communities that we can describe as communist are the exception. Theoretical communism is not a teleology; it doesn't pretend that industry was inevitably inscribed in the destiny of humanity. It only takes note of the fact that human beings did not find within themselves the means of unifying into a human species. If they had been telepaths, perhaps the universality of the species would have affirmed itself differently, by avoiding the long detour through class societies. But as it exists today humanity will benefit from communising for itself the means of production and communication created by Capital.

In the absence of modern industry, the followers of Babeuf could only with difficulty make a revolution. The decisive absence in their time was not the lack of an abundance of consumer goods, for material wealth is not simply appreciated in terms of quantity (the revolution will reorient production and close all those factories which are not adaptable to communism). What the Babouvists lacked was this mass of people, who possess the capacity to make their revolt succeed through having universally unified productive forces at their disposal. Technology is not so much used to produce goods in abundance as to create the material basis of *social ties*. And it is only for this reason that the capacity to produce a lot, to transport rapidly, etc., are conditions of communism. The historic contribution of capitalism is the product of one of the worst horrors it has committed. It has not allowed man to become social or human, as a human species, while at the same time it has *uprooted him from the soil*. Ecology would like to return him there but man will only once again put down roots if he appropriates all of his conditions of existence. Having given up the obsession with his lost roots, he will put down new ones which will weave themselves together ad infinitum.

The modern proletariat, who appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time as the revival of the word itself, is not more exploited than the slave or the serf. The difference between them is qualitative : the proletariat is the first whose exploitation is accompanied by a radical dispossession of himself *at the very moment* when the conditions of a communist revolution seem to have come together. Elementary struggle is not a form of existence of the proletariat, because the proletariat only exists as a group of proletarians acting collectively in a revolutionary sense. Even if embryonically, the proletariat only exists as a revolutionary force. Within society, there always exists both a diffuse communist movement and isolated proletarians. Only occasionally, when the communist movement passes to the offensive, is there a proletariat. The proletariat is the agent of the communist movement. It tends towards communism or it is nothing.

If the proletariat possesses reality only within a dynamic, the class struggle, and cannot be reduced to a statistically measurable quantity, it still doesn't just have a merely negative existence – it also exists in an *internal* relation to Capital. A necessary bond unites those who will attempt a communist revolution and their reality within capitalist social relations. They will only destroy the capitalist relation inasmuch as they are a constituent part of it. Only the associated labour which capitalism has generalised gives a consistency to the connection between the productive activities of proletarians all over the world. Failing which, this connection can only be ensured by commodity exchange, by the coexistence of states or through moral force as in utopia.

Until now, social movements, including the communist left in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have wanted to organise men, to create a space in which to join them together, because they had insufficiently coherent links between them to rise up. But from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, capitalist development has created a condition of communism by giving birth to a real « man of nothingness ». Whatever the scarcity or abundance of goods, this being is totally denuded, for within his life activity has become secondary to the market consumption of objects or services, which have now been rendered essential. The proletarian is the person who is separated from everything, and who enters into relation with this everything through *needs*. Saint-Simon defined the industrialist as the « man who works to produce or put at the disposal of the different members of society one or more material means to satisfy their physical needs and tastes ». Human action now comes second to its result, objectified within a product which one must buy.

« Look at Raphaël [the hero of *The Wild Ass's Skin (La Peau de chagrin)*]. How the sentiment of self preservation smothers within him any other thought ! (...) he lives and dies in a convulsion of selfishness. It is this personality which corrodes the heart and devours the entrails of the society we live in. As it increases, individuals isolate themselves; the more ties, the more common life. »

(Balzac, preface to *Romans et contes philosophiques*, 1831.)

It was in opposition to this degeneration of human activity, in which poverty became no more than the corollary of the level of consumption, and in opposition to the new form taken by « wealth » that the communist movement grew in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through setting as its goal the recomposition of a man who was not separated from his activity, from others and from himself. In our opinion Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* are the best synthesis of this immense aspiration toward a world without mercantilism or individualism, a world where man is the principle wealth of man. If for this alone, this text justifies Rosa Luxemburg's formula : that Marx thereby expresses a movement which goes beyond himself, and which exceeds the theoretico-practical needs of his time.

In all periods it is *communism* which defines the revolutionary movement, as opposed to the left and leftism. Its wholly *negative* affirmation (against the State, against the trade unions, etc.), which in any case would only really emerge after 1917, is merely a logical consequence of this. If you really want to destroy the roots of capitalism and not just organize it differently in order to better distribute its wealth, then you must attack everything that helps it to function and tends to « improve » it – the State, politics, trade unionism, etc. Communism is not a mode of production but above all an entire mode of existence. « To each according to his needs ? » Yes, but only because communism is primarily activity. It is not constructed, it liberates the means of life from capitalist fetters and transforms them.

*Economic man* is connected to the world by needs, which he satisfies by producing objects and then by buying them. The revolution, which calls into question the commodity, also challenges the being defined by needs. Need implies separation : man needs objects produced outside of himself, and his perpetually unsatisfied frenzy of consumption arises from this separation, for it seeks within the object that which is no longer there : the activity which produced it. In the same way, labour,

however pleasant it is, produces nothing directly for yourself and obliges you to buy what you need elsewhere. Imposed by 150 years of capitalism, the concept of need is the result of capital's integration of human activity, separated into two successive acts : to produce and to buy.

But, through its violence, the severing of the connection with their roots in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provoked a democratic upsurge which offered proletarians a substitute community, as political activity came to compensate for the practical activity they were henceforth deprived of. However the most outstanding aspects of the movement prior to 1848, the most forceful texts, and the insurrectionary gestures, such as the riots by Silesian weavers in 1844 which were theorised by all of the radicals, showed the working class in the guise of a monster which, emptied of any substance, *could only* attack the foundations of the system. Having made a clean sweep of all previous community, industrialisation no longer left any space except for a human community. Engels said of Irish workers that with a few hundred lads of their calibre one could revolutionise Europe. Balzac echoed this in his own way when speaking in 1844 of « these modern barbarians which a new Spartacus, part Marat, part Calvin, would lead in assault on the wretched Bourgeoisie whose power has expired ». The fact remained that the social vacuum created by Capital filled itself by itself. In 1848-50 the communists – Marx and Engels included – hardly put communism forward, even as a distant programme.

Even in its most violent actions, the proletariat did not act as communists. The Lyons insurrection of 1831, which brought into the open the question of the working class, was only the self-organisation of wage labour as such, the hierarchical structure of labour being transposed into a military community. In June 1848, it was the working class districts which took up arms but without leaving the arena of wage labour. As with many other defensive movements, where proletarians are killed on the spot without taking on their *condition*. In England, the riots of 1842 and 1848 were the most violent until those in Brixton in 1982. But Chartism diverted energies into the demand for universal suffrage. The immense crowd which united on Kensington Common in South London on April 10, 1848 did not take the next step...

In 1847, Marx wrote : « Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The domination of Capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against Capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle (...) this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests. » (*The Poverty of Philosophy*, in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 6, p. 211). But contrary to the theory the proletariat didn't act for itself. The achievements of the – democratic – revolutions of 1848-50 remained on this side of the hopes of the previous day.

However the twenty years that led up to them were essential in the formation of the communist movement, and not only theoretically : the theory would not have approached communism as it did without a practical movement. To cite only one example, it is sufficient to compare the forms of organisation before and after 1848. The trade unions which appeared after 1848 were a regression compared to the first workers' associations, which had tried to unite professions and different skills – a union of trades and not trade unions as subsequently. These associations had combined utopian aspirations, social demands and political reforms. The communist

movement grew on terrain that on the whole was reformist, but where the question of communism was raised. By contrast the International Working Men's Association, founded in 1864, would above all be an organisation of labour.

## From Utopia to the Critique of Capitalism

In their practise, the proletarians of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century remained torn by the coexistence, within the same society, of two opposed universes : that of Capital, which socialised the world by uniting them at work, and their own life of not entirely atomised exclusion, for Capital had not yet completely destroyed the old collective ties, particularly in the industrial villages formed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At that time revolutionaries believed that they could solve the contradictions between society and individual, wealth and poverty, Capital and labour, thanks to a community that arose, not from the « natural » coherence of activities, but from the practical realization of a communal *principle*, whether it be profane or sacred. Saint Simon, Owen, Cabet and Fourier wished to establish the community like a business enterprise. Feuerbach compared humanity to a god : « The unity of me and of you, is God », said Feuerbach. Certain utopians were communist in that they wanted communism; but they did not want a revolution.

A social movement, the proletarian movement was also international : groups of exiles and craftsmen travelled all over Europe. Sometimes it was also a political movement : many bridges connected it to the democratic upsurge, which as we have seen ended up by absorbing it. Cabet, far from being an ivory tower thinker, had a political career behind him. For a long time he had cherished the project of rallying the republican opposition around the idea he held of communism. « ... we, communists, we have always called for and always will call for the union of all democrats ... » he wrote in 1845. He said that at this time his paper *Le Populaire* had « perhaps a hundred thousand readers ». And it was political failure which incited him to found Icaria, his ideal society, « elsewhere ».

The real social bond between them being neither sufficiently strong or visible, people tried to create unity on the basis of a principle that stood outside the world, but which conformed to man's essence. Against the horror of Capital they opposed man's nature. Utopianism coincided with anthropology. As Feuerbach said : « Man's essence is only contained in the community... Man must lead a life in conformity with his true nature : a "generic" life ».

Fourier's strong point was that unlike Cabet he didn't attempt to form a « new man ». He started out from what exists, describing the human being at length and making an inventory of his passions, in order to show, beyond his function as producer, the plurality of his being. With the aid of his classifications, he opposed a society, which in 1830 just as today, primarily saw man as a worker. His critique went beyond the capitalist era; Fourier took on a « civilisation » within which capitalism, in his eyes, was no more than one moment, and proposed to restore nature, which had been pillaged by men. That which humanity must attain by the natural movement of its needs and actions, Fourier wanted to organise by means of a plan. This would classify the passions in order to harmonise them. Critical of science – he let himself be guided by intuition – Fourier remained a system man. He privileged knowledge and he looked for THE solution, whose application would depend only on capitalist good will. Neither politics nor revolution had any place in his thought, in which the proletariat remained an *object*.

After Fourier, utopia became radicalised. Always posing the question of a different life, it wondered about the nature of the revolution which would bring it into being, and about the forces which would make that revolution. Prior to 1848 revolutionaries like Dezamy passed from the problems of the human being to those of social groups and the struggles which set them in opposition. They no longer started from man's essence but from his historical development, and began by making a critique of alienated labour. The principal reproach they addressed to the utopians was not of being visionaries, but of hoping to achieve their vision by means of recipes, instead of conceiving of a solution starting from existing conditions. By contrast, the theoretical communism of the period from 1840-48 sought to pierce the secret of the irresistible force of such a degrading system as capitalism. Rooting itself in reality, it would espouse its contradictions and finish by being drawn in to them.

It is to Marx's credit that he was the first to show that the aspiration for a human community, some aspects of which could be better expressed by others like Fourier, can only succeed on the day that social life has acquired a collective character for all men, and thus crossed a threshold beyond which associated labour and common action made it possible to make the revolution. In *Capital*, Marx would describe the mechanism of this process, whose content had been outlined in the *1844 Manuscripts*. But Marx was to lose the original communist thread through involving himself in an analysis of capitalism from the inside, and no longer from a communist perspective. Far too much he would see the communist movement as being like the movement of the bourgeoisie, a movement which expanded the development of the productive forces. His contradiction was to have privileged *political economy* while making a critique of it, and to have made a critical study of it without it ceasing to be his theoretical horizon. Marx simultaneously criticized *Capital* from a capitalist point of view *and* from a communist point of view, but he forgot that the development of production is only useful to the proletariat as the means of destroying itself as proletariat. Often he studied the proletarian condition starting from capitalist development and not from the social activity confined within in it.

However, he remained the only one, in his time, to offer an overall vision of the historical process, from the original communities to the reconciliation between man and nature. Since his work achieved the greatest synthesis of the period, its contradictions were only the more acute. The same movement simultaneously led him to develop and to abandon the communist dynamic. In this way, he expressed in theory the practical contradictions which the proletariat ran up against in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and heralded its subsequent conquest by Capital and then its reappearance as communist proletariat in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Marx was the product of the strength and the ambiguity of the communism of his time.

« Marxism » – the subsequent use of Marx's work – would resolve the contradiction that ran through his work by neutralising its subversive aspect. The *tendency* of revolutionaries like Marx to bury themselves in the critique of capitalism in itself, was turned by Marxism into the sole *reality*. It is the thought of a world incapable of thinking of anything other than Capital. « Revolutionary » vis-à-vis pre-capitalist societies and social strata, it identifies itself with progress and the economy. In this way Marxism constitutes one of the dominant ideologies.

For theoretical communism Marx is no more and no less exempt from criticism than

Fourier or the communist left after 1914. Those who don't understand Fourier or Gorter don't understand Marx, and vice-versa. Theoretical communism, as expressed by Marx, cannot be completely digested by Capital because it contains more than an exposition of the *internal* contradictions of capitalism. This is not the case with Saint-Simonism, for example, whose programme was entirely realised by Capital : the development of production, the creation of an industrial class, the reduction of politics to management, the generalisation of labour. The « industrial system » is Capital. By contrast, even in those texts by Marx most open to criticism, communism remains present, if only in negative. To believe in a Marx fully realised by Capital, is to believe in a Marx as described by Capital.

The qualitative weakness of the proletarian assault in 1848 enabled Capital to absorb limited aspects of its revolutionary critique. But it must be recognised that « Marxism » *also* contaminated revolutionaries, as much at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as nowadays. The radical groups which came after Marx believed that capitalist expansion would limit the segmentation and division of the working class, by removing, for example, the dominant position of English Capital, and by slowing down the formation of a privileged working class strata. They did not see capitalism's capacity to create a new community, and to absorb the organisations born from the terrain of the class struggle. The illusion of the simplification of the communist question through capitalist universalism remains a widespread idea. No matter what some say, in the revolutionary ranks « the development of the productive forces » often remains a good thing in itself.

What past failure hasn't been explained by the insufficiency of the degree of industrialisation ! And this error in perspective also deforms the communist vision. It makes the constitution of the human community depend on economic growth : « when the productive forces gush forth in abundance ... » It results in brushing aside the risk of seeing the emergence of conflicts in communism by postulating the existence of a humanity that has finally become « good » because it has an easy life. Both the Left and leftism justify authorities – whether « revolutionary » or progressive – which they support in the name of the necessity to manage scarcity. The revolutionaries explain proletarian failures by the insufficiency of resources.

This illusion amounts to making us, in Guesde's expression, « the sons of horsepower ». It takes up the twin dreams – of capitalist and worker – of being able to escape from exploitation thanks to technology and automation. Capital dreams of passing beyond the wage-worker, the source of conflict. Wage workers dream of passing beyond the capitalist, the boss and the profiteer. The first longs for a machine which dispenses with human initiative; the second for a machine which would rid them of human management.

The appearance of « Marxism » at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the product of the remoteness of the communist perspective, which fragmented and divided itself into two monsters : Marxism and anarchism. (The choice of the terms attests to the confusion - each having initially been employed by the other camp before their use imposed itself on everyone). These two monsters, which grew into two poles of theory and practise, each erected a partial aspect of communism into the totality. Marxism hypertrophied the concepts of economic growth and crisis, of the seizure of power and centralism. Anarchism hypertrophied the concepts of the liberation of men, of self-government and of autonomy. Isolated, each of these aspects lost any subversive potentiality; one-sided, they opened themselves to becoming agents of

capitalist modernisation. Anarchism rewrote history by reducing it to the fight between two principles : authority and freedom. Marxism interpreted it from the standpoint of the development of production. When the visionary dimension remained, as in Bebel with his book on *Woman and Socialism*, or in the work of Kropotkin, it was like a mutilated fragment. Anarchism continued to preach certain modes of refusal of capitalism – free love, communal life – but detached from a global vision. The synthesis attempted before 1848 had shattered into pieces.

## Nineteen-Seventeen and afterwards

« As for me, I see a sufficient demonstration of the need for communist revolution in the social tremors of the inter-war period. In fact, it is the most sufficient of demonstrations... The disgusting international situation, constantly aggravated, completely corresponded to this »

(G. Munis, *Parti-Etat. Stalinisme. Révolution*, Spartacus, 1975, p. 84)

The scale and the depth of the second great proletarian assault are particularly explained by what proletarians had previously undergone and *undertaken* – they had to rebel against what they had largely contributed to creating. The defence of labour power, undertaken by the labour movement up to the war in 1914, could neither prepare the revolution, nor even *unite* workers. The trade unions never integrated the unemployed. The latter conducted specific struggles (the big hunger marches in the US after 1929), but for their own objectives : to obtain work. During this period employed workers themselves demanded the maintenance and improvement of their work. On this basis, *the straightforward defence of work*, there could be no possible solidarity. Thus the awakening in 1914 was painful – the proletariat discovered not only that « its » organisations belonged instead to capitalism, but that « the class » would only *unite itself* for radical action and in violence.

The cynicism of a J. Gould, the American industrialist and multimillionaire, who in 1886 declared : « I have the means to hire half the working class to kill the other half » (quoted in F. Browning et J. Gerassi, *Le Crime à l'américaine*, Fayard, 1981, p. 183), well expresses Capital's contempt for man. But most of the time the capitalists don't need to buy the exploited in order to hurl them against the others. The violence of *economic* and *political* contradictions is sufficient to organize one against another. All « defence of employment », from the demands of the AIT, to the disguised xenophobia maintained by trade unions today, ends in protecting wage workers *against* others.

Gould's statement sums up his period – the employers strategy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century did indeed consist of lowering wages and lengthening the working day, while forcibly opposing attempts at workers organisation. It would not apply to the period which opened in 1914-18. But in 1909, Lozinsky still published a rather pessimistic assessment, country by country, of the situation of Capital and the working class. For him, growth didn't improve working class conditions, but sometimes aggravated them. Democracy was a capitalist weapon. Their own organisations reinforced workers' submission to Capital. The factory, which organized workers, only united them in servitude. Capitalist development didn't strengthen the communist movement.

« Then the engineers, the accountants, the technicians multiplied themselves (...) Because one cannot leave the former savage near the machinery, he might break it. No, it is necessary that the workers are instructed and well trained (...) That is why the professors and writers, these specialised trainers, multiply (...) The democratic state signifies that the scientist takes the place of the police. It is for this reason that social leaders multiply :

deputies, politicians, agronomists, statisticians, newspaper columnists, lawyers, etc. » (J.Makhaïski, 1908, *Le socialisme des intellectuels*, Le Seuil, 1979, p. 198)

In the social life and evolution of organisations, what counts is their *function*, not their initial doctrines. Whether it derives its origins from anarchism or from socialism, syndicalism above all emerges as an impotent reaction against reformism, and ends up by giving in to class collaboration. Overly disappointed, former revolutionaries lapsed into elitism. Thus in the work of Georges Darien, one of whose characters no longer sees anything except a « dirty sale » between « a handful of desperate recalcitrants » and « the aristocracy of money » (*Les Pharisiens*, 1891, UGE, 1979, pp. 125-126).

« ... it was a beautiful day that they blended into one another, proletariat and bourgeoisie, and despite their denials, walked hand in hand. Through being affectionate, they were to end up by spanning the muddy pit which separated them with state socialism, this *pont d'Avignon* on which the horny handed proletarian dances a carmagnole with petty industry and petty commerce, regulated by industrial tribunal ... » (*Id.*, pp. 124-125)

By contrast, after 1917 it was undoubtedly the *communist* movement as such which reappeared in Russia, in Germany and elsewhere. Yet it would never be the heart – that is to say the practical goal – of the social agitation, which mainly remained in the wake of democracy. It emerged, but only as programme.

« Why would we need money, all Petrograd is in the hands of the workers; all the apartments, all the stores, all the factories and workshops, the textile mills, the food stores, everything is in the hands of the social organisations. The working class doesn't need money », proclaimed Bleikhman, a Russian anarchist worker in 1917.

But proletarians did not take the measures of communisation which would have rendered market exchange useless. The council movement which appeared in 1917 aimed at taking back control of productive activity. In Russia it was a reaction to the impotence of the bourgeoisie. In the United States and Germany it was a reaction against Scientific Management. The defeat of 1919 was that of the skilled workers in the Berlin metal working industries, who formed the heart of the USPD. During the risings in central Germany in 1921, the workers who took centre stage were unskilled, as at Leuna where B.A.S.F had created a modern chemical plant, with an unskilled labour force supervised by skilled workers from other areas. The workers at Leuna and elsewhere, would resist repression and the divisions in their midst for a long time. But their armed organisation was the proletariat in arms – a proletariat which did not undertake to destroy itself as proletariat.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, far from causing « the ever expanding union of the workers » (*Communist Manifesto*, section 1), struggles for wage demands had split up proletarians along the dividing lines of the division of labour. Accentuating a tendency which had already taken shape in industrial unionism, after 1914-18 the community of struggle passed from the craft union to the factory council, inside which collective labour, which had been broken up and decomposed by Capital, tried to regain the common existence it had lost.

Nevertheless, unlike the non-revolutionary « communists » such as Fourier, the proletariat of 1917 no longer sought to act alongside the state, or else to convert it. From the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly after 1914-18, the movement explicitly set as its goal, not the conquest of the state, but its destruction. As regards practise it is sufficient to compare the collective suicide of the workers in the old quarters in Paris in 1848 to the offensive of the red army of the Ruhr in 1920 – even though the latter subsequently came to a halt, consumed from within by democracy. As regards theory, we can contrast the ambiguous declarations of Marx (and those of Engels which are stripped of any ambiguity) about the possibility of a peaceful transition towards socialism, with the theses of the communist organisations after 1917.

But what does the demand for the demolition of the state mean if it is limited to that ? If the proletarian movement is content to merely occupy the centre of capitals (such as Berlin in January 1919) or to confront the army, it rushes towards defeat. Where the state was weak, as in Russia, proletarians might even overthrow it. But this only meant taking its place and letting the « workers state » manage wage labour, in other words manage capitalism. The proletariat conducted a critique in deeds of the State, but not of Capital as a historic social relation. In Russia and in Germany, it would almost always be a matter of reorganising labour, of reforming the world of the economy, not of communisation. The communist movement became bogged down on the terrain of power.

When Italian workers occupied the factories in September 1920, particularly in Turin, the government allowed the strike to deteriorate by itself. The proletarians did not take the initiative. The State was even clever enough to accept « workers control ». Once it is constituted as a social force, the proletariat has nothing else to organise but its own suppression. Its constitution must coincide with its self-suppression through the propagation of ever larger waves of communisation infecting all activities and all social strata. In the absence of this process, which it did not spark off after 1917, the « organised proletariat », and even « the proletariat in arms », was forced to give way before the weight of capitalist relations which were not long in returning to occupy the entire terrain.

In 1917-21 the language of the social movement remained political. Just as the millenarians had believed they were realizing a divine principle, the most extreme workers acted as if they were realizing a new principle of power, based on workers self-organisation. They believed that they had accomplished an advance compared to the party and trade union bureaucracies, but they did not define communism. Political and no longer religious, the movement secularised itself, but once again it still acted starting from something other than itself.

Aroused by the Russian revolution, the wave of revolutionary and reformist-demand struggles (the two combining and sowing confusion in *all* minds) would reverberate from continent to continent over the next twenty years. Everywhere the bourgeoisie would end up by taking back what it had been forced to concede. In vain the English and Welsh miners struck for weeks, even months, against wage cuts. In the United States, around 1919, the IWW increased from 40,000 to 100,000 members, just before disappearing. France passed a law establishing the eight hour day but dismissed 18,000 railwaymen in 1920 – it was one of the most serious defeats for French workers. Starting in Russia and central Europe the wave of struggles swept as far as China (1926) and the United States. Fighting a capitalism that was in the

middle of modernization, American workers succeeded in setting up... a trade union federation. But the strength and ambivalence of their action was confirmed by the fact that the CIO had difficulty in controlling them. In 1937 sit-in strikes, which were pro- and anti-union at the same time, erupted just after the agreement between the United Auto Workers and General Motors. In exchange for recognition the trade unions had agreed not to support the wildcat strikes, which were characterised as unofficial. Against this agreement between the bosses and the unions, the workers occupied the factories and, as at Flint in Michigan, used non-bureaucratic methods which displayed a high degree of organisation, but they no less continued to support the union.

It took the war to bring order to the American working class : after Germany declared war on the USSR, the Communist Party which more or less directly controlled one third of the members of the CIO, approved the anti-strike clause signed by the unions. The confrontation in May 1937 between the workers of Barcelona and the Spanish Republican State, marked the last revival of the wave of 1917. Once again the contradictions in proletarian practise can be measured by the fact that the majority of the insurrectionists belonged either to the CNT or to the POUM, which did everything they could to stop them, and succeeded. « A historical cycle was closed with the destruction of the Spanish revolution : that of the first international offensive of the proletariat against capitalism » (Munis, *Parti-Etat. Stalinisme. Révolution*, Spartacus, 1975, p. 67) Once again the proletariat hadn't acted as a « class for itself ».

In spite of a global capitalist expansion the proletariat didn't know how to prevent either the – fatal – time-lag between the various national uprisings or, in particular, the democratic corruption. It recognised its enemies – who since 1914 had revealed themselves for what they were. It did not do what was necessary to destroy them, since it took on the visible enemies and not the things their power was based on : the relations of wage labour and the market. Although, in contrast to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it sometimes took the offensive, it continued to pursue political action. In short, it only put forward « the tactical requirements of the first stage of the new movements : anti-parliamentarism, anti-unionism and anti-frontism » (*Mouvement capitaliste et révolution russe*, Brussels, 1974). Consequently, the communist left , which would occupy itself for years in attempting to understand what had happened, would distinguish itself by its *refusals* : refusal of trade unions, of the State (even, and especially, the democratic State), of the Popular Fronts, of the USSR, of national liberation movements, of the Resistance, and so on, and this because the proletariat no longer intervened as a social force. This obliteration of communism as a historic force was not necessarily more serious than that in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was certainly more striking.

**understanding  
the counter-revolution  
and the revolutionary  
return**



re-collecting our past (6)  
understanding the counter-revolution  
and the revolutionary return

## **From the German Left to *Socialisme ou Barbarie***

A communist movement, universal in nature, which had set out to conquer the world in capitalism's footsteps, had been led into not taking the offensive except in the centre of Europe. Now it was necessary for it to engage in drawing up an assessment, beginning with itself, and with the contradictions of the counter-revolution.

The following revolutionary generation had the advantage of being able to cast a clearer critical gaze on this period, but they were to run into additional difficulties about being able to go back to the source of theories, echoes of which had ended up becoming louder than their initial sound.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 testified to the monstrous bankruptcy of the bourgeois world and the workers' movement. However, after bourgeois humanism and wage-labour reformism had collapsed, side by side, in the mud of the trenches, they both acted as if this catastrophe hadn't rejected the basis upon which they had prospered and driven millions of beings into the abyss. Everybody applied themselves to recreating the same pre-1914 situation, but better, more modern and more democratic, whereas the whole of capitalist civilization had proved its failure, confirming the apocalyptic forecasts of the revolutionaries and the warnings of the more lucid bourgeois.

« We are the last [of the republican mystique]. Nearly the *après-derniers*. Immediately after us begins another age, another world, the world of those who no longer believe in anything, or who have any pride and glory in it. »  
(Péguy, *Our youth*)

And, to still further increase the confusion, under a radical mask Russia, the Communist International and the Communist Parties were also supporting the reconstitution of a labour movement and a renovated democracy, which didn't take long before resembling their predecessors.

As distinct from those who vainly relied on activism, the communist left understood the depth of the counter-revolution and drew out its consequences. It affirmed itself as resistance to Capital and, because of this, it proved incapable of leaving its entrenchment's in order to imagine the future outlines of a revolution different from those which had occurred after 1917, beginning with the new situation, but above all, with the invariance of the nature of the communist movement.

The ultra-left was born and grew in opposition to Social-Democracy and Leninism – which had become Stalinism. Against them it affirmed the revolutionary *spontaneity* of the proletariat. The German communist left (in fact German-Dutch), and its derivatives, maintained that the only « human » solution lay in proletarians' own activity, without it being necessary to educate or to organize them; that when they acted by and for themselves the seeds of radically different social relations were

present in workers actions; that the experience of taking their struggles into their own hands prepared them to take the whole of society into their hands when the revolution became possible; that proletarians today must refuse to allow themselves to be dispossessed of even the most negligible actions by the trade union and party bureaucracies, in order tomorrow to prevent any so-called workers' state from managing production in their place and instituting state capitalism, as the Russian revolution had done. Finally it affirmed that trade unions and parties had become elements of capitalism.

Before being reduced to the status of tiny groups, the German Left had been the most advanced (and numerous) component of the movement from 1917 to 1921. Later, whatever its weaknesses, it remained the only current to defend the exploited in all circumstances and without concessions. In the same way, it refused to support any war, whether anti-fascist (unlike the Trotskyists and a great number of anarchists) or national (unlike the Bordigists), with the exception of the Spanish War, during which, following in the footsteps of anarchism, it had gone so far as to support the CNT.

Affirming within its theory the autonomy of the proletariat against state intervention, it denounced everything that deprived the working class of its capacity for initiative : parliamentarianism, trade-unionism, anti-fascist or national fronts, such as the French Resistance to German occupation, and any apparatus tending to constitute itself into a party above the working class.

« The emancipation of proletarians will be the work of proletarians themselves », says the *Manifesto*. But what sort of emancipation ? For the German Left communism was confused with workers' management. It did not see that autonomy must be exercised in all fields and not merely in production, that it is only by eradicating market exchange from all social relations, from everything which nourishes life, that proletarians will retain mastery of their revolution. To reorganise production once more, is to give birth to a new administrative apparatus. Anyone who puts management forward condemns themselves to creating a managerial apparatus.

The management of our lives by bureaucrats is only one facet of our dispossession of ourselves. This alienation, the fact that our life is decided by others than ourselves, is not merely an administrative reality which another form of management could change. The monopolization of decisions by a privileged layer of decision makers is an effect of the social relations of the market and wage labour. In pre-capitalist societies, the self-employed craftsman also saw that his activity escaped him as it entered into the price mechanism. Little by little the logic of commerce tore away any choice from his actions. However there was no « bureaucrat » to dictate his conduct. Money and wage-labour already contain within themselves the possibility and the necessity of dispossession. There is only a difference in degree between the dispossession of the craftsman and that of the unskilled worker in BMW. Admittedly the differences between them are not slight, but in both cases their « ... work depends on causes set apart from them... » (Dézamy, *Code de la communauté*, 1842). As for managers, they embody this alienation. It is thus no more a matter of replacing them with workers' councils, than it is of replacing the bourgeoisie with bureaucrats from the trade unions and parties – the result would resemble the Russian experience after 1917.

Caught in pincers between the SPD and the CIO – the two forms of the counter-revolution born out of workers' struggles – the German Left had to oppose itself to both of them. But it had difficulty in seeing that the IWW would have disappeared or become a reformist organisation. As an autonomous workers' organisation, the IWW retrospectively displayed all the virtues. But it is not enough for a structure to be workerist and anti-bureaucratic for it to be revolutionary. That depends on what it does. If it takes part in trade union activities it becomes what the trade unions are. Thus the German Left was also mistaken about the nature of the CNT. Nevertheless, overall it showed that it's too superficial to only take account of the trade unions, and that it is the *reformist activity* of workers themselves which maintains organised, openly counter-revolutionary, reformism.

The German Left understood that the *bourgeois* world before 1914 had given way to the *capitalist* world. It could recognise Capital everywhere it existed, including the USSR, whereas it was not until 1945 that Bordiga put things so clearly. Council communism ended up by confining itself in councilism, but, immediately after the 1939-45 war, it saw the necessity of leaving behind the theoretical framework defined between the wars. In 1946 Pannekoek understood that the proletariat had undergone « a failure linked with aims which were too limited » and that « the real struggle for emancipation hasn't started yet ». The purest expression of the revolutionary proletariat after 1917, the German Left also reproduced its limitations, which on its own it could not pass beyond.

Inheriting the mantle of the ultra-left after the war, the magazine *Socialisme ou Barbarie* appeared in France between 1949 and 1965. Organisationally, the group which constituted itself around the journal was not descended from the German Left but from Trotskyism, before soon being joined by defectors from the Italian Left. Even if it never claimed this filial relation itself, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* none the less belonged to councilism, which it had come to as a result of a reflection on bureaucracy, arising from a rejection of the Trotskyist positions on the USSR.

One of *Socialisme ou Barbarie's* merits was that it looked for « the answer » in the proletariat. Without populism or any pretence of having rediscovered some kind of « workers' values », it understood that *workers' speech* was indeed a condition of the communist movement. Thus it supported forms of expression such as *Tribune Ouvrière*, published by Renault workers. In this way it placed itself within the wider movement which would culminate in May 68 and give birth to preliminary sketches of autonomous organisation such as Inter-Enterprises. That a minority of workers' come together and take up speech is truly a condition of communism.

Unions and workers' parties offer their services to wage workers in exchange for recognition and support, including financial support. Extreme-left groups pretend to offer the waged a better defence of their interests than the union and party bureaucrats, who they consider to be too moderate. In exchange they demand even less : approval, however half-hearted, for their programme. Interventionists or libertarians, all see the same *solution to the continuity* between proletariat and communism – they conceive the content of communism as being outside the proletariat. Not seeing the intrinsic relation between proletariat and revolution – except that it is the former which makes the latter – they are obliged to *introduce* a programme.

*Socialisme ou Barbarie* showed that workers' action contained more than a struggle

against exploitation and that it carried within it the germ of new relations. But it only saw this in self-organisation, not in proletarian practise – the monstrous avatar of human life produced by Capital which, in erupting, might engender another world.

Providing that one doesn't become entangled in questions of organising and managing work, the observation of factory life makes it possible to illuminate the communist direction of proletarian struggle. Thus, the testimony of the American worker Ria Stone published in the early editions of the magazine went further than the theorising on the content of socialism done later on by Chaulieu (but publication of Stone's text wouldn't have been possible without Chaulieu's 'error').

*Socialisme ou Barbarie* broke with workerism. Lefort's « The Proletarian Experience » is undoubtedly the most profound text published by *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. But he indicated the group's limitations and in so doing announced its impasse. In effect he continued to search for a mediation between the misery of the workers condition and their open revolt against Capital. However, it is within itself that the proletariat finds the elements of its revolt and the content of the revolution, not in any organisation posed as a precondition and which would either bring it consciousness or offer it a base for regroupment. Lefort saw the revolutionary mechanism in proletarians themselves, but in their *organisation* rather than in their contradictory *nature*. So, he too ended up by reducing the content of socialism to workers' management.

Moreover, instead of the testimony of workers' which Lefort wanted, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* threw itself into workers' sociology, ending up by making everything turn on the distinction between direction and execution. In this it differentiated itself from *Information et Correspondance Ouvrières* (ICO) – which Lefort rejoined – a workerist and councillist bulletin and group, a more immediate expression of workers' autonomy, and from the *Groupe de Liaison pour l'Action des Travailleurs* (GLAT) equally workerist, but concerned with publishing minutely detailed analyses of capitalism's evolution. Each in its own way, ICO and GLAT would be present at the university centre at Censier, occupied by revolutionaries in May 68.

The Hungarian Revolution gave a new vigour to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, while reinforcing its councillism. In effect, they saw in it the confirmation of their theses at a time when the « council » form was coming to prove that it was capable of acting in a manner totally contrary to councillism, for example in giving support to a Stalinist liberal. Before long, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* abandoned its old Marxist reference points and threw itself into an intellectual wandering which was to end in 1965. This evolution brought about the departure of the « Marxists » who founded *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (PO) in 1963. And it was one of PO's member's, Pierre Guillaume, who went on to found the bookshop la Vieille Taupe two years later, which later on we will see the role of.

Like the Situationist International, but in a different way, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* « clung » to the modernisation of Western society. Its theses on bureaucratic capitalism and on bureaucratic society, born simultaneously from the spectre of a seizure of power by the Stalinists and from the overturning of French society which had been orchestrated by the State, expressed the crisis which gnawed into the dominant industrial model, particularly in France. By propagating slogans like « Workers' Power, Peasants' Power, Students' Power » (PSU tract in June 1968), by

making « autonomous and democratic management » into the number one objective, the May 68 movement popularised themes of *Socialisme ou Barbarie's*, while at the same time demonstrating the limits both of the group and of the entire movement.

In 1969 the journal « *Invariance* » concluded that : « '*Socialisme ou Barbarie*' wasn't an accident. It clearly expressed a position diffused on a world scale : the interpretation of the absence of the proletariat and the rise of the new middle classes...*Socialisme ou Barbarie* fulfilled its role of surpassing the sects because it opened into the immediate, into the present, severing any attachment to the past... » (Series I, no. 6. p29)

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## The Italian Left and Bordiga

Following the example of the other currents of the communist left, that known for simplicity as the Italian Left showed that the proletarian was more than just a producer who fights to end his poverty (the thesis of the left) or to end his exploitation (the thesis of leftism). It could recognise in Marx's work « a description of the character of communist society » (Bordiga). It affirmed the anti-market and anti-wage content of the revolution. And it got back in touch with utopia.

« We are the only ones to base our action on the future. »

Bordiga made an implicit critique of the division between science and utopia that Engels had established in the *Anti-Dühring*, which he said, rested on « a false basis ». He defined revolutionaries as « explorers of the future ». For him, utopia was not prediction but the perspective of the future. He restored to the revolution its human dimension and even approached what, twenty years later, would be called ecology. But he conceived of the revolution as the application of a programme by « the party », not as a dynamic uniting men as they communise the world.

However, one can foresee that a movement of communisation, that destroys the State, undermines the social base of the enemy, and spreads under the effect of the irresistible appeal arousing the birth of new social relations between men, will bond together the revolutionary camp far better than any power which, while waiting to conquer the world before communising it, would behave no differently than... a State. A series of basic measures and their ensuing effects will permit an enormous saving of material means, and will multiply resourcefulness tenfold. Communism will bring about the abandonment of many sorts of production, which result from « economies of scale » imposed by the needs of profitability. Valorisation, which imposes concentration, pushes capitalism towards gigantism, (megalopolises, a bulimia of energy) and obliges it to disregard all non-profitable forces of production. Communism by contrast will be able to decentralise, to use local resources, and not because humanity centralised in a party will have decided on this, but because the needs which arise from people's activity will impel them to live differently on this earth. Then the conflict of « space against concrete » which Bordiga spoke about will cease.

The Italian left, especially after 1945, put forward communism without grasping it as a movement of human activity with the tendency to liberate itself. After 1917, the proletariat had struggled without attacking the foundations of society, and as a result radical groups had the greatest difficulty in intellectually grasping the foundations of social life and hence of the revolution.

Moreover, Bordiga did not draw out all the implications of his vision of communism. Instead of defining the « dictatorship of the proletariat » beginning from communisation, he confined it to a political dictatorship, which from the start made it a question of power. The German left had had the intuition that communism dwells in the nature of being proletarian, without grasping the true nature of

communism. By contrast the Italian left understood the nature of communism but deprived the proletariat of a role in implementing it in order to entrust this to a party, guardian of principle, charged with imposing it by force.

Certainly, Bordiga made a justifiably strong critique of democracy. People often reproached democracy for separating proletarians, who were united in action, through the vote, and instead they recommended « true democracy » or « workers democracy », where decisions would be taken by everyone in general assemblies, etc. However Bordiga showed that democracy brings about this separation in decision making because it separates out *the moment of decision itself*. To make believe that one can suspend everything for a privileged moment in order to know what one will decide and who will carry it out, and to create for this purpose a process of deliberation and decision making : here is the democratic illusion ! Human activity is only driven to isolate the moment of decision making if this activity is itself contradictory, if it is already traversed by conflicts and if antagonistic powers are already established. The structure for the encounter of different opinions is nothing but a façade masking the real decision, imposed by the prior play of forces.

Democracy establishes a break in time, *makes it as if one were setting out again from scratch*. One could apply to the democratic ritual the analysis which Mircea Eliade makes of religion, where periodically one replays the passage from chaos to order, placing oneself out of time for a brief instant as if everything had again become possible. Democracy has been erected in principle in societies where the masters have to meet to share out power by complying with the rules of a game, even if it means resorting to dictatorship (a permissible form of government in ancient Greece) as soon as play is obstructed.

While demonstrating very well that the *democratic principle* is alien to the bases of revolutionary action and of human life, Bordiga was incapable of imagining the interaction of the subversive activities of proletarians, and he could conceive no other solution than dictatorship (of the party). The German left had fallen into the democratic error through fetishism of the workers councils. Having failed to seize the subversive capacities of the proletariat and their ability to centralise their actions, the Italian left ran up against the false alternative which it had itself denounced, and pronounced itself in favour of dictatorship, even of implementing a monolithic discipline when necessary.

Deeply contradictory, Bordiga implicitly criticised Lenin, social democracy and Marxism – but only halfway. Returning to Lenin's theses he went so far as to write a long eulogy to « *Left Wing Communism - an infantile disorder* », which misled a large part of the generation of revolutionaries that appeared after 1968, who would only see Bordigism as a variant of Leninism.

For the German left the unitary rank and file organisations of the workers represented the class. For the Italian left unions represented the class. The fact that workers found themselves in unions seemed more important than *what they did there*. « The union even when it is corrupted, is always a workers centre » (Bordiga 1921). From this point of view the union always contained the potential for revolutionary action. In both cases, the form – the organisation of workers – was put before its content – the function of this organisation. Bordiga's fundamental error was to maintain the division between politics and the economy inherited from

the Second International, and which the Third International did not call into question. The revolutionary offensive of 1917-21 had rejected this separation in practise but it had not gone far enough to impose it within the thought of the whole of the communist left.

« Proletarian consciousness can reappear insofar as the partial economic struggles develop themselves until they reach the higher political phase which poses the question of power » (*Communisme*, No. 1, April 1937).

No. It is necessary that the seeds of a social critique *already* exists, as much in the initial phases of a movement as in the later, (how to discover it, to help it mature, everything depends on this... ), a critique which calls into question both economy and politics through a refusal of realism (of demands compatible with the life of the business enterprise), and of mediation (sharing power, placing any confidence in organisations between labour and Capital).

Bordiga's weakness arose from his inability to comprehend that communism emerges from the needs and practises created by the concrete condition of the proletariat. Bordiga posed the question of the TRANSITION from workers economic struggles to politics. He inadequately distinguished the revolutionary process. He knew that communism *is not built*, that the revolution is satisfied to leap over the obstacles to a life for which most of the elements already exist « in the entrails » (Marx) of capitalism. But for him the revolution remained the action of a political power which modified the economy. He did not see that communisation and the struggle against the State are necessarily simultaneous.

Speculation over the different forms of organisation (council, party, workers mass organisations) and the separation in theory between politics and economy testified to the fact that the proletariat, which before 1914 had lost the sense of its unity, had hardly recovered it after 1917. The organisation came to fill the vacuum left by the absence of revolutionary action by proletarians. When social contradictions don't bring about a subversive movement, a theoretical master-key is sought. Bordiga found it in the economic movement of the workers, which was supposed to generate revolutionary action thanks to the assistance of the party. This initial assumption replaced the vision of the totality.

*Invariance*, which took up Bordiga's theses, had begun to appear before May 1968. At the bookshop La Vieille Taupe, Pierre Guillaume insisted on the importance of this review to friends and customers. The principle merit of *Invariance* was to have attracted attention to the richest aspects of Bordiga's theories, at a time when the International Communist Party, which particularly undertook the management of the Bordigist heritage, said little about them, even concealing the identity of Bordiga in the name of party anonymity, preferring to stress the refusals of the Italian left : the fight against antifascism, or against educationism, etc.

Bordiga had seen in Marx's work a description of communism. From its first issue, written by Camatte and Dangeville, *Invariance* affirmed that « Marx and Engels derived the characteristics of the party form from the description of communist society ». But *Invariance* remained a prisoner of the metaphysics of the party.

During the period 1917-1937 – and even less with the apogee of the counter-revolution that marked the war and the post-war reconstruction – the proletariat

had not imposed itself for what it is – the result of the practices and needs arising from its fundamental condition. To resist the counter-revolution, the Italian Left constructed a metaphysics of the proletariat, an entity which took the place of the absent real movement, and its reference to the party was used to preserve a revolutionary perspective, just as its distrust of « anarchism » (a term which was used to include the councilism of the German Left) served as a defence against the risk of deviation towards democracy.

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## **Towards a Revolutionary Return ?**

During the period between the end of the revolutionary assaults following the 1914-18 war and the mid-1960s, the proletariat ceased to exist as a social force in each of the countries in which it had appeared – after 1921 in Germany, after 1926 in China and after 1937 in Spain – but it hadn't therefore disappeared.

The working class continued to act in the colonial countries among others, but often as a support for a weak national bourgeoisie. Although this role was determinant in its transformation into an object of Capital, this didn't entirely stifle an endemic state of rebellion. Black Africa saw impressive strikes after 1945 : railwaymen in French West Africa in 1947-8, general strikes in Dakar and Conakry in 1953. In Guinea, Mali and the Ivory Coast an osmosis took place between the indigenous trade unions and bourgeois democratic parties. And after these countries gained independence, the single parties that governed them had difficulty in controlling the tendencies towards insubordination (the major strike by dockers in Ghana in 1961).

In the United States, despite the antistrike laws, in Germany under Nazism, and in the Eastern European countries under Stalinism, a rebellious fraction of proletarians continued to appear.

The general strike at FIAT in 1942, and the numerous strikes in Italy in March 1943, were diverted away from a proletarian direction, and reoriented by the bourgeoisie and the State towards a return to democracy (the anti-fascist and pro-ally u-turn of July 25<sup>th</sup> 1943). Nazism was unable to prevent either of the important strikes in Germany at the end of 1941 and 1942. These were all of such an extent that the rebirth of the « Italian left » was constructed on the idea of the rebirth of a movement. (We should remember that on the eve of 1939 the group which had first published *Bilan* and then *Octobre* wondered whether a revolution wasn't possible, and even theorised on the basis of its probability).

Equally, before the end of the war a debate began in the revolutionary movement about whether a revolutionary outcome was possible. Munis did not exclude this possibility. Bordiga did not believe in it. In fact, the victorious countries – including Italy – were far too won over by democracy, and as a result it succeeded in absorbing the social tensions that to some extent reigned everywhere. In Germany, at a moment when the State had collapsed, the existence of millions of demobilised soldiers, foreigners of different origins and ex-prisoners created a situation of disorder. But the different groups involved, although potentially revolutionary, did not possess sufficient cohesion to affirm themselves and seek something other than *survival*. Those excluded from production were marginalized and appeared incapable of acting; those who were integrated into it demanded its maintenance and democratisation, and sought recognition. Relative working class passivity was also caused by the repression exercised by the employers militia's. The role of the « industrial police » would only decline when Capital was able to go into partnership with the workers, towards 1950. Until then they remained necessary to prevent or repress the riots provoked by hunger (1947), and the general strikes against monetary reform (1948).

« (...) A fragmentary working class autonomy exhausted itself, during the decisive months after the wars end, in solving the most important problems of existence of the class and, a long way behind this, came a working class reformism that was impotent, but strong enough at the right moment to retake control of all the embryonic attempts put forward to construct an antagonistic workers power » (K. Roth, *L'autre mouvement ouvrier en Allemagne. 1945-1978*, Ed. Bourgois, 1979, p. 21)

The period after 1947 witnessed very tough struggles in Japan; strikes lasting several weeks led to a strike ban in public utilities (1948), the laying off of 30% of the personnel at Toyota (1950) and massive dismissals at Nissan (1953).

Capital's strength derived as much from military or police violence as from its economic dynamic. In West Germany the massive introduction of assembly lines, and the equally massive recruitment of unskilled workers to man them, involved the progressive elimination of the highly skilled workers, and the marginalisation of the Communist Party (KPD), which ended up being banned in 1956, and only reappeared as the DKP in 1969. The German bourgeoisie invested in precisely those sectors where the Communist Party was strong, the mines and the iron and steel industry, in order to create « a new type of worker both "depoliticised" and dominated by the machines » (Roth), thanks to the influx of refugees from East Germany, and thus it recreated the division between Germans and foreigners which had been maintained between 1942 and 1944. When the refugees in their turn made demands (1956-57), Capital started to import workers from southern Europe, and there would be a million of these by 1961.

We can thus see the permanence of workers resistance to Capital and the generalisation of Scientific Management. In 1946, nearly three million American workers struck against the fall in real wages, but the trade unions dominated the strike. In 1959, 600,000 American steel-workers went on strike for 116 days to preserve the unions consultation rights over methods of production and obtained a paper victory. But none of this prevented the post-war economic boom, still in its ascendant phase, from swallowing these movements up. From the mid-1960s on the other hand, there began a fall in industrial profitability, which is analysed by economic experts today from a quasi-« Marxist » perspective.

Capitalism – the transformation of labour into commodities – dominates the whole of society when it integrates into its cycle the *conditions of reproduction* of the labour force, i.e. when it transforms the whole of life into commodities. But this domination runs up against an obstacle arising from the fact that one cannot reproduce human beings, even proletarianised human beings, like mass-produced objects. Moreover, the scientific organisation of work which breaks down work into individual operations, enters into contradiction with the indispensable continuity of the production process.

Finally, workers resistance also entailed a reduction in profitability. In Italy, certain strikes in 1960 prefigured the events of 1969 by calling into question, not just wages and working conditions, but the « regime of the factory itself » (Grisoni, Portelli, *Les luttes ouvrières en Italie de 1960 à 1976*, Aubier-Montaigne, 1976, p. 70 ), and also by holding big assemblies within the factory. A strike by electrical engineers (1960) mobilised whole districts, and students joined the workers. In

1962 a strike at Lancia also broke out of the factory and spread into the city. In the Milan-Genoa-Turin triangle, immigrants from the South of Italy, less under the control of the trade unions and of the Socialist and Communist parties, would form the spearhead of the strikes during the 'economic miracle'. These strikes culminated in 1962, in Turin, where workers fought the police for three days and destroyed the head office of the UIL, a trade union comparable to Force Ouvrier in France. In West Germany, the years 1966-7 marked a sea-change in capitalist attitudes, not only with respect to immigrant workers (300,000 of them were expelled) but to labour in general. From now on Capital imposed norms on those workers who in the past had escaped the most restrictive tasks, as well as on white collar staff, thanks to the introduction of cybernetics and data processing. Postmen, an expanding sector of wage workers, were subjected to accelerated mechanisation and launched strikes, poorly controlled by the trade unions, in the United States and Canada (1970), the UK (1971) and in France (1974). In Germany, students launched struggles (1966-7), and were soon followed by the workers who struck in massive numbers in 1969. In France, the strikes in the six months up to May 68, particularly the workers riot at Caen, were the signs of a rebellion that began amongst unskilled workers, and marked a break, albeit still only superficial, with the prevailing consensus. Youth in the universities saw that their future prospects in *management* were not as attractive as promised; young workers no longer accepted workplace discipline as easily as the older ones who were better integrated into Capital. The economic cycle (the first signs of the post-war boom grinding to a halt) became combined with a generation gap.

In the United States, for example, the young people of the Thirties and Forties, unionised in the CIO, were the « integrated » of 1950-60, who defended their privileges thanks to American trade union structures (*closed shop, union shop*), and by playing the employers game of dividing the workers. The movement of the Sixties was in part born outside and against them, from a deterioration of the living conditions of certain fractions of the working class (women, ethnic minorities, youth), whereas the « standard of living » of middle aged, white, male workers continued to rise. After 1950, American working class trade unionism started to decline, new workers not unionising very much, and a whole sector of the working class saw its conditions of employment, and of health etc., start to deteriorate.

The end of the Sixties thus certainly marked a change. Rebellion became radicalised more quickly, because at the same moment Capital was still in an ascendant phase, yet this ascent was disrupted by failures. The first restrictions in what Capital offered led precisely to a critique of what it offered, and not, as in periods of recession, to the requirement that it continued to offer the same thing as before, only better if possible.

The bourgeoisie would counteract with political readjustments. In 1969, Germany saw the arrival into power of an SPD-liberal coalition, the legalisation of the communist party, desired by a fraction of the employers, and the scrapping of the factory militias that had been created shortly after the war and which numbered 60,000 men. The project of factory self-policing, a mass organisation regrouping the silent majority against the radical minority, was abandoned. The socialists in power undertook to reinforce the machinery of the police and to introduce exclusion legislation (employment bans). But the existence of an alternative political solution – the left – doesn't imply that it must come to power every time there is a crisis. In France, for example, a left-wing government which had remained in office

since 1968, or even 1974, would soon have been used up. To remain credible and be able to play its role, the left must remain as a hope, fulfilled from time to time, but not too often. That is what happened in 1967 in France, when the right won the legislative elections with only a one vote majority.

As the balance of power evolved in favour of workers, and repression, layoffs and even unemployment proved insufficient to discipline them, it became necessary to find something else; to turn against workers their aspiration to no longer be pawns, as they put it. On one side this meant contractual politics, and unitary trade-union representation. On the other, it meant a movement to the left (sometimes even leftist) by the trade-unions, and the ideology of self-management.

Industrial reorganisation, which was both cause and effect of chronic working-class insubordination, led to the separation of a layer of executives, deprived of any understanding of the work process, from a layer of supervisors which had greater control of the whole of the enterprise and formed (so the employers hoped) a new workers aristocracy. But the bosses didn't succeed in turning the trade-unions into « associations of heads of department, assistants, timekeepers and foremen with a certain support among newly qualified workers (...) » (Roth, p. 121). In any case would this have been desirable ? It would be dangerous for Capital to systematically exclude underprivileged employees from any form of representation.

In any event, this reorganisation did not make it possible to prevent conflict. Whereas in Germany in 1969 the middle managers and skilled workers had taken the leadership of the movement after two days, in the strikes of 1973 the unskilled, who amongst other things were demanding flat-rate increases across the board, remained autonomous and went as far as forming some non-trade union strike committees; however this did not prevent the employers from successfully countering these strikes. The centre of gravity of the class shifted. In Ford-Germany there was a big movement but also a big defeat : the leadership were obliged to squash a strike which went too far. The workers didn't have the strength (the will or the need) to go beyond the strike, even when it was quite solid. Here we run up against the eternal problem : an occupied factory can be a weak point if you entrench yourself into it as a stronghold, for the State can always bring superior forces to bear. But if strikers seek to leave the district or factory they control, they can be stopped or forced back. How, therefore, can you avoid a withdrawal into the workplace, while going beyond a simple work stoppage or refusal of work ? As the president of the works council in Ford-Germany in 1973 said « There is no room here for improvements, either we shut up, or we make the revolution ».

From the end of the post-war boom, the underprivileged sectors of wage workers (those who had recently joined the labour force, poorly qualified youth, immigrants, underpaid women) took militant action. The first instances occurred in 1967-8 (car production workers in France) and the examples then multiplied (post-office workers, casual workers in Italy, etc). These struggles differed from the « crisis » actions linked to employment, as at LIP in France or among steelworkers. Admittedly they retained some elements of traditional demands : a uniform rise in wages, longer holidays, the correction of the gap which had opened up as wages had fallen behind those of other sectors (a widening of wage differentials was one of the conditions of the post-war boom). And they were not necessarily anti-union – 1968 was sometimes an opportunity to establish trade unions in backward

companies.

In France, this struggle of the new sectors of wage workers often erupted in unusual companies, far from the large cities and the traditional bastions of workers struggle like Renault – strongholds which were also prisons, even without surrounding walls and gates. Capital believed it had nothing to fear from a docile workforce in those companies created during the industrial decentralisation of the 1960s, which had made it possible for it to combat the resistance of skilled workers to the scientific organisation of labour, in other words to break up the « red » quarters by establishing « different » factories in the countryside. These factories had been set up like new schools, and the former peasants, women and young people had gone there to play their role under the paternal leadership of a manager who had become the « company head ». These employees began by demanding what bosses « normally » granted proletarians. And their protest ended by leading them to call into question not just their wages and terms of employment but also those who managed (bosses), defended (police) and fixed (trade unions) those conditions. May '68 would see a vague realisation that all these conservative forces lived off the established order and needed to maintain it. Against them, or rather in spite of them, « May » would imagine nothing more than generalised self-management, which people would speak of but not initiate. But the movement which appeared around 1965 was powerful enough not to be exhausted by the limits of May '68.

In the United States there was the conjunction of a student refusal (against the war in Vietnam), an abundant movement among unskilled workers, and riots (following Watts in 1965) which questioned not the relations of production but the relations of distribution, not Capital in its entirety but the commodity form which it imprints on life. The « revolutionary return » at the end of the 1960s was signalled by the *convergence*, but neither the *interpenetration* nor the fusion, of actions born within production alongside those bearing on commodity exchange. As a social system modern wage labour synthesises the productive act inside the business enterprise and the « free » disposal outside of it of the money earned there. As long as the questioning only relates to one or other of these spheres (work/outside work), the wage system preserves its unity and strength.

A mistaken perspective, due to the rise of black nationalism in the United States (counter-revolutionary like all nationalism), created a belief in the existence of a specific and more radical black working class movement. In fact the American proletarian revolt was no more virulent among black workers than among white. Working class conservatism, which exists among construction workers for example, was no worse in the United States than in France. Support by American workers for Nixon against the Vietcong was no greater than that of French workers for the successive governments during the war in Algeria.

The events at Lordstown (Ohio) lie at the transition between two periods. At the end of the 1960s, it was one of the last big applications of fordism. To produce the Vega, General Motors attracted young workers (the average age was 26), increased productivity, increased the proportion of unskilled labour, and deskilled everything while offering more money (as Ford had done 40 years earlier), but it also introduced automation. In 1970 it was the first car manufacturer to install automated assembly lines with machines from Unimation (the first American manufacturer of robots). The other car manufacturers would wait until the mid-

1970s to follow suit (Renault only in 1979). The rate of production at Lordstown was double the global average (100 vehicles an hour instead of 50). Designed to counteract the passive and active rebellion of the young workers, the system led to a doubling of absenteeism and latent sabotage. Capital had wanted to increase production rates without proposing to increase the wage rates it had paid the workers for a long time : but mass consumption no longer compensated for the alienation of work as in 1920 or 1930, its novelty was exhausted. The endemic revolt didn't prevent the trade union from leading and sabotaging the 1972 strike, which was undoubtedly « the first great anti-automation conflict in the U.S. » (Le Quément, p. 197), together with that of West coast dockers against containerization (1971-72). The Lordstown struggle was settled with 800 workers laid off, but it particularly showed the bourgeoisie that automation had to be introduced gradually, or risked starting up disputes (already latent and sometimes explosive) over industrial work. Thus automated assembly lines coexisted with traditional assembly lines.

The American anti-war movement, pacifist as a whole, would nonetheless play a subversive role in opposing the State and the army at war. It was a critique of an expanding world which had entered into crisis (we do not say decadence). Was it merely chance that it was in 1965 that the United States sent 500,000 soldiers to occupy South Vietnam (not even to wage war : it hardly engaged the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese troops) ? This task force, which experts from the start said would be ineffective, was a typical product of an overconfident Western capitalism, as confident in its industrial model as in the superiority of the form of war it conducted compared to that of « under-developed » nations. The refusal of the war by a large part of American youth attacked the very foundation of a contemporary civilisation that was both commodified and statist. Through the same movement, American pacifism accused the State and Capital of occupying everything, and of not granting enough autonomy and social space to « the people ». *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, whose last issue appeared in 1965, was, here again, an appropriate expression of this real quest for a new world, even if it didn't take on the roots of the old.

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## The Situationist International

The capitalist invasion of the totality of life, accelerated by the cycle of prosperity which began in the 1950s, had produced its liberal critique : works by Vance Packard on planned obsolescence, of Riesman on the solitary crowd, of Henri Lefebvre on everyday life, etc. The more slowly commodified industrial countries, like France, had for a long time maintained a chilly attitude to « Americanism » (see in particular *Le Monde*). About 1960, at a time when a practical critique by proletarians coincided with an initial concern about the limit and direction of this growth, the whole mode and even style of modern capitalist life was in the hot seat. In this context, the Situationist International (1957-1971), the meeting point of the New World proud of its modernity, and of the Old World undermined by mass consumption, uniting Germans, Scandinavians and Americans on the one hand, and French and Italians on the other, would make a decisive contribution to the critique of the generalised colonisation by the market.

A product of the prosperity of the 1960s, the S.I. could undertake a critique of the world without shutting itself into the economy/production/factory/workers, while at the same moment workers, as at FIAT in 1969, made the space outside work (housing and transport) a starting point for their action. The S.I. reconnected with the critique of political economy of the period preceding 1848.

Historical evolution forces us to see that waged life doesn't just take place in the workplace. The old workers movement, which disappeared as a social network to give way to negotiating bodies, had extended its ramifications to all aspects of the life of the proletarian. Today parties and trade unions are salesmen who play the role of social services and largely function like state administrators.

The S.I. criticised « urbanism », science and the techniques of recreating social relations where the roots of previous collective bonds had been torn up. Capital had destroyed both city and countryside, producing a hybrid space, a town without a centre. (In this way Capital created a space in its own image, that of a society without a centre, but whose centre was everywhere.) The many attempts at experimental model cities (like Pullman near Chicago, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) prevented neither social problems nor workers riots. The worker-employer's city, like the project of Nicolas Ledoux at Arc-et-Senans at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, failed because waged life cannot have the workplace as its only centre. The « normal » modern city integrates workers better because they need a capitalist environment, rather than an employers'. This capitalist environment maintains a community even if it is to a large extent (but not completely, far from it) a market community constituted by the television and the supermarket, with the car as a means of connection between disconnected places. TV, supermarket and car still presuppose the existence of human beings to watch, to go and to make them function more or less together.

Faced with the modern city the S.I. sought new uses for certain places. It gave new life to utopia, to positive as well as negative utopian visions. At first it believed that it was possible to experiment with new ways of living but it ended up by showing

that this re-appropriation of the conditions of existence presupposed nothing less than the collective re-appropriation of all aspects of life. It gave new meaning to the requirement to create new social relations. Where most revolutionaries debated « power », or the « withering away of the state », it put forward revolution not as a political affair but as changing the whole of life. A « banality » you say ? But a banality that was only reintroduced into the revolutionary movement in the 1960's, and thanks to the activity of the S.I. among others.

A product both of the councillist left, (Guy Debord was a member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* for some months), and of its rejection, the S.I. started from a critique of the spectacle as passivity, and the transformation of all activity into contemplation, and this led it to affirm communism as activity.

Iconoclastic, freed from the problematic of workers' organisation (unlike groups such as Pouvoir Ouvrier or ICO), the S.I. shook up the ultra-left. But its theory of the *spectacle* drove it into an impasse : that of councillism. More the expression of attacks on the *commodity* than of an (absent) general movement against Capital, it didn't produce an analysis of the whole of the capitalist process. Like *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, it saw in Capital a form of management depriving proletarians of any power over their lives, and concluded that it was necessary to find a mechanism permitting the involvement of all. To this it added the opposition passive/active. Having conceived capitalism theoretically more as spectacle than as Capital, it believed that in order to break the passivity it had found a means (democracy), a place (the council) and a form of life (generalised self-management).

The idea of the spectacle swallowed up the idea of Capital and effected a reversal of reality. Indeed the S.I. forgot that « the most significant characteristic of the capitalist division of labor is the transformation of the worker from an active producer to a spectator of his own labor » (*Root and Branch : The Rise of the Workers' Movements*, Greenwich, Conn. 1975. From *A Break With The Past* by Stanley Aronowitz). The « spectacle » has its roots in the relations of production and of work, in that which constitutes Capital. One can only understand the spectacle starting from capitalism, not the other way round. Spectacle and passive contemplation are the effects of a more fundamental phenomenon. It is the relative satisfaction of the « needs » created by Capital over the last 150 years (bread, employment, lodging) that causes passivity in behaviour. The theoretical conception of the spectacle as the motor or essence of society was idealistic.

Thus the S.I., following the German left, recognised revolutionary spontaneity, but without showing the nature of this spontaneous activity. It glorified general assemblies and workers' councils, instead of specifying the content of what these forms were supposed to achieve. Finally, it gave in to the same formalism as the ultra-left which it mocked, not seeing the beam in its own eye.

The S.I. showed the religious aspects of militancy – dissociated practise in which the individual acts for a cause while making an abstraction of his personal life, repressing his desires and sacrificing himself for an objective outside himself. Even without talking about participation in the classical political organisations (Communist Party, Extreme Left. . . .), permanent revolutionary action certainly sometimes turns into militancy : entirely devoted to a group, obsessed by a particular vision of the world, the individual becomes unavailable for revolutionary acts on the day that they actually become possible.

But this refusal of militancy, instead of anchoring itself within a practise, and within an understanding of the real relations which can prevent the development of militant behaviour, contributed to the requirement inside the S.I. for a radical attitude in all things. For one militant morality it substituted another, radicality, just as unworkable and just as intolerable.

Not satisfied with denouncing the spectacle, the S.I. undertook to turn it back against the society that lived it. The Strasbourg university scandal which heralded May 68 was a success. But the S.I. erected the process into a system and misused it so much that it rebounded back against itself. The repetition of the techniques of advertising and scandal turned into systematic counter-manipulation. There is no such thing as an anti-advertising advertisement. There is no good usage of media to get across revolutionary ideas.

In opposition to militant false modesty the S.I. put itself centre-stage and enormously exaggerated its impact on the world situation. Its repeated references to Machiavelli, Clausewitz and other strategists were more than just teasing. It was persuaded that an appropriate *strategy* would allow a clever enough group to manipulate the media and influence public opinion in a revolutionary direction. This is certainly proof of its confinement in the concept of the spectacle, and ultimately, of its incomprehension, through idealism, of the spectacular phenomenon. When it presented itself as the centre of the universe, and as the agent of revolutionary maturation, etc., one first thought that it was being ironical. When it made a constant theme of it, one ended up wondering if it didn't believe the enormities which it spread about itself.

The S.I. provided the best approximation of communism among the theories which had a genuine social diffusion before 1968. But it remained the prisoner of old councillist illusions to which it added its own illusions about the establishment of a revolutionary « *savoir vivre* » ['art of living']. It created an ethics in which pleasure took the place of human activity. In doing so it didn't get beyond the capitalist framework of the abundance permitted by automation, and was content to describe the end of work as an immense passionate leisure.

The Italian left had put forward communism as the abolition of the market and had broken with the cult of the productive forces, but it was unaware of the enormous subversive power of concrete communist measures. Bordiga put communisation back to the day after the seizure of power. The S.I. presented the revolution as an immediate and progressive decommodification. It saw the revolutionary process within human relations. Indeed, the State cannot just be destroyed on the military level. As the mediation of society it must also be annihilated by undermining the capitalist relations which sustain it.

The S.I. finished up in an error symmetrical to Bordiga's. The latter had reduced the revolution to the application of a programme. The S.I. were to limit it to overturning immediate relations. Neither Bordiga nor the S.I. saw the totality. The first conceived a whole abstracted from real relations and practical measures, the second a whole without unity or determination, the sum of partial points spreading little by little. Incapable of theoretically dominating the whole of the revolutionary process, they both resorted to organisational palliatives : the party for one, councils for the other.

In his practise Bordiga depersonalised the movement to excess, going so far as to deny and efface himself behind a self-mutilating anonymity which permitted all the manipulations of the (Bordigist) PCI. By contrast the S.I. affirmed the individual to the point of elitism, going so far as to take themselves as the centre of the universe.

Although they were largely unaware of Bordiga the S.I. contributed as much as him to the revolutionary synthesis that was outlined around 1968.

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## La Vieille Taupe

When *Socialisme ou Barbarie* rejected « traditional » revolutionary theory for good, a minority left it and regrouped around the journal *Pouvoir Ouvrier*. *Pouvoir Ouvrier* wanted to retain the good aspects of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, while ignoring the common thread linking the origins of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* to its subsequent deviations. *Pouvoir Ouvrier* fell short of the German Left on many points : trade unions, the party, imperialism and the national question, etc. In fact different ultra-left tendencies coexisted within it, united only on the questions of the capitalist nature of Russia and worker's management. At its head was Vega, a former member of the Italian left who had joined *Socialisme ou Barbarie* shortly after its foundation. But this ex-« Bordigist » brought nothing of Bordigism to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, having found in the Italian left only a purer Leninism than that of the Trotskyists, and supplementing this with the theses on state capitalism and workers management.

A duplicated monthly magazine with a thousand readers, *Pouvoir Ouvrier* acted as if it were read by 100,000 proletarians each week. In depth articles were rare. Often these were by Pierre Souyri, under the pseudonym Brune, who had been the author of two essential texts on China published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.

In 1965, Pierre Guillaume, a member of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and then of *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, founded the bookshop la Vieille Taupe, in the rue des Fossés-Saint-Jacques in Paris. Around it a current of reflection and activity came together which was as interested in the Situationist International, which for a while maintained relations with the bookshop, as it was in the Italian left, at that time known almost entirely through the filter of the International Communist Party (PCI). Pierre Guillaume took part, for example, in the English edition of the Situationist International text on the Watts riots. *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, undoubtedly feeling vulnerable, to the point of fearing that this (second) current could threaten the unity and life of the group, organised an absurd disciplinary hearing in September 1967, at the end of which Pierre Guillaume and Jacques Baynac were excluded for « fractional work »... A good half-dozen of the other members resigned. They formed themselves into an informal group which everyone called « La Vieille Taupe ».

From its start, the bookshop refused a doctrinal label. It was not a local section of *Pouvoir Ouvrier* (while Pierre Guillaume was still a member), nor its bookshop. At a time when it was difficult to obtain the essential revolutionary texts, very few being available for sale, many out of print etc., it wanted to facilitate access to them. In 1965 the mere fact of selecting texts by Marx, Bakunin, the *Situationist International*, *Programme Communiste* (the organ of the PCI) and texts by the ultra-left took on a theoretical and political meaning. In its way la Vieille Taupe took part in the theoretical synthesis which is indispensable at all times. It went beyond the sects without simply taking in everything « to the left of the Communist Party », like the bookseller and publisher Maspero (who at one time even refused to sell *Voix Ouvrière*, the [Trotskyist] ancestor of today's *Lutte Ouvrière*, because it appeared too hostile to left wing parties and trade unions !)

In 1967, at a time when the Communist Party was more concerned to publish Thorez and Stalin, the bookshop bought up the considerable remainders of the material published by Costes, the only real French publisher of Marx before the war. At the start of 1968, when the Communist Party's *Editions Sociales* version of *Capital* was out of print, the only place where the three volumes could be obtained was La Vieille Taupe. The bookshop distributed the unsold stock of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, but also that of *Cahiers Spartacus* which had published many titles after the war, about the whole of the workers movement from the extreme left to the extreme right. Thousands of copies of texts by Luxemburg, Prudhommeaux etc., which had been gathering dust in a cellar in the town hall of the V<sup>th</sup> district were once again offered to the public.

La Vieille Taupe did not deny the need for coherence. It only considered that it could not be reached starting from just one of the radical currents of that period (all of them one-sided), nor just by starting to listen to workers (like *Informations et Correspondances Ouvrières*), nor just by studying the forms which modern capitalism had taken (as Souyri, who kept away from the unrest provoked by the split in *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, would have wished). Instead it would involve a theoretical appropriation of all of the currents of the communist left (and thus also of the historical ground on which they had come into being), and of the Situationist International, as well as a reflection on communism and, in particular, on the contribution of Marx.

The small heterogeneous group which had come out of *Pouvoir Ouvrier* had little or no « public » activities in the months preceding May 68. Mainly, it collectively read *Capital* and started to assimilate the components of the communist left, as well as of the Situationist International. La Vieille Taupe was not a group; rather it was the crossing point of various threads, with a dominant anti-Leninism, which was thrown into a new perplexity by the arrival of *Invariance*.

It would be absurd to claim that the existence of this small regroupment played a decisive part in May 68 or afterwards. What occurred there under privileged conditions (because we were able to benefit from the experiences handed down by various groups which had already sorted through a mass of ideas and facts), also, of course, occurred elsewhere – often in confusion, sometimes perhaps with greater clarity. What's important is that the process of theoretical *maturation*, without which the shockwave of 1968 would have gone less far, related to *the following points* : communism, the function of democracy and proletarian spontaneity, and not to the string of non-problems that was conveyed, even by part of the ultra-left (consciousness, leadership, management, authority, etc). May 68 was not a revolution (!), but what this movement actually was would not have existed without that maturation.



# **history and personal narrative of the last fifteen year**



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## Nineteen Sixty-Eight

In this last section our angle of vision narrows still further, since we will be speaking in particular of the things we did within a movement which did not succeed in extending – and thus internationalising – itself. To pretend to have a distant and objective point of view about this would be dishonest.

Today at the end of the period covered by this very provisional assessment, the only clear perspectives are those of Capital, although we hardly know whether they will be successful. Present day speech is that of Capital because the social initiative belongs to it.

There is no technological determinism; the solution (capitalist or communist) to any crisis is social. Human activity, and in particular the organization of work as expressed and shaped by Capital, have once again entered into crisis. The current period is certainly counter-revolutionary – a restructuring by crisis – but is also the beginning of a new cycle of struggles integrating proletarian experience of the « recovery » that began in the 1960s. The period from 1968-72 was the beginning of a phase – now in the process of being superseded – marked by a crisis of the Scientific Management of work. The search for productivity, which increased exploitation, involved a great many tough strikes in small and medium sized companies, and by the most exploited workers in large companies, until roughly 1975. But these struggles for wages and differentials only perpetuated those divisions between proletarians, which are maintained by Capital, and managed by the bosses and trade unions.

The difficulty in understanding the current period, and in acting, arises from the emergence of a new organisation of work, which has not been able to establish itself, and which is at the same time both cause and effect of other struggles, the contours of which are not yet clearly visible.

Proletarians often went beyond the framework of trade unionism, and sometimes even fought against it. But a *defence* of its condition by the proletariat could not enable it to reorganize society. Today, going beyond that defensive posture only exists negatively. People dreamed of self-management : who now takes it seriously ? People spoke a great deal about ecology : who now believes it is possible to prevent the development of the nuclear industry in France since the left in power has accepted it ?

« All the current problems of the apprehension of the revolution, which one finds to a greater or lesser extent in all the theorisations that are made, stem from the fact that the proletariat can no longer oppose Capital with what is within the capitalist mode of production, or rather, can no longer make the revolution the triumph of that which exists . . . »  
(*Théorie Communiste*, n° 4, 1981, p. 37)

In our opinion, May 68 in France was the peak of a shockwave which had begun a few years earlier and which died away after 1972-4. The year 1968 itself was rich in both positive and negative events for communism. In the United States, the anti-

war movement became radicalised as the fighting intensified (the Tet offensive) but didn't link up with the workers movement, while the riots in the black ghettos tended towards violent nationalism and (or) reformism. In Mexico a violent student revolt ended in a carnage (300 dead) which reinforced democracy. In Czechoslovakia the invasion by Warsaw Pact troops more closely united «the people» around national and liberal solutions. The dominant consequence worldwide was the democratic containment of a phenomenon which had potentially (but only potentially) gone beyond democracy.

The explosion did not take place in either the most modern sectors of the industrialised world, or those most in difficulty, but where the boom over the previous twenty years was least well adapted to national conditions. Between 1954 and 1974 the proportion of wage workers in the French population rose from 62% to 81% (the increase above all affecting those employees, technicians and middle managers who made up the new middle classes). We witnessed the fusion of violent workers demands and of anti-authoritarian, anti-repressive student aspirations which soon extended to a good part of the new middle classes. The movement was also anti-cultural in that culture formed a safety deposit box and was the opposite of creativity. It thus revived the refusal of art and culture which had appeared about 1914-18.

May 68 was more than a split between the trade unions and parties on one side, and a great many workers on the other. It was also a demand for existence, which in the absence in practise of a social breakdown, appeared more as expression than action. People wanted to communicate, to speak, to say that which could not be done. The rejection of the past didn't succeed in giving itself a content, and thus a present. The slogans : « I believe in the reality of my desires », « Under the paving stones, the beach », referred to a different possibility, but one which, in order to become possible, presupposed . . . a revolution. In its absence, this demand could only become adaptation or madness. The themes of May took the form of exhortations, replacing 19<sup>th</sup> century guilt with the imperative of pleasure.

Indeed, aside from a weak minority, the workers, the bourgeoisie, most of the « protestors » and the State, in short everybody, acted as if there was an implicit pact prohibiting everyone from going too far. Sign of its limit : people did not dare, did not even want to make a revolution, not even begin it. Sign of strength : people refused the political game of a pseudo-revolution, since a real one could only be something total. Even in the rue Gay-Lussac the violence remained well on this side of the working class violence before 1914, or that seen in the United States in the Thirties. The confrontations between workers and trade unions were less brutal than in the past, for example at Renault in 1947.

In the factories in 1968 one hardly found the festive atmosphere of 1936. People felt that something had happened which could go further but they avoided doing so. The atmosphere of gravity which reigned was coupled with a resentment against the unions, a convenient scapegoat, whereas they were only able to keep control through the behaviour *of the rank and file*. The gaiety was elsewhere, in the streets. This is why May 68 could neither reproduce, or lead to, a revolutionary return during the years which followed. The movement generated a reformism which fed on the neutralisation of its most virulent aspects. History doesn't pass the dish around a second time.

The problem of the State was not raised : 1968 was not the start of a revolutionary phase. A revolutionary movement will not be born from a deepening of May but from a break with the period inaugurated by May. In the will to go on mass strike there lay a refusal; in the manner of conducting that strike, and in particular of abandoning it to the trade unions, only in order to rebel against them at the end when they had scuppered it, there lay an acceptance.

People criticised power while everywhere seeking to take it. They ridiculed parties and groupuscules only to praise the March 22<sup>nd</sup> Movement, the bridge between leftism and the radicals (the Enragés for example). They denounced politics only to be filled with enthusiasm for a February 1848 style fraternity (while awaiting April 1974 in Portugal). The conjunction achieved between the struggles of workers, and those of prospective middle managers kicking over the traces, sought a different means than those proposed by the traditional right or left : the demand for a modern « environment », for the advantages of capitalism without the disadvantages.

A text written a few months later for *Vieille Taupe* by François Martin (at the time unpublished), expressed this simple notion : in May-June 1968, everyone had thought and acted within the framework of democracy. The Committee for the Maintenance of Occupations (CMDO), organised by the Situationist International, called for the formation of workers councils. To exhort the creation of a form and imagine that this will give its action a revolutionary content, here is the democratic and political illusion. May 68 realised the programme of the Situationist International, as Hungary 1956 had realised that of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* : in both cases, the councils. While *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the Situationist International were moments of the life of the proletariat, they never expressed the whole of its life-cycle. Where workers attempted to give life to democratic forms (the base committees of Rhône-Poulenc at Vitry), they exhausted themselves in this task, using up the energy which they then lacked to carry out the actions that were necessary.

The June 1968 elections did not mobilise workers, (or anyone else except the parties), either for or against them. They did not drown the movement, which had already enfeebled itself through having failed to take the initiative in mid-May, and which was simultaneously bogged down in violence (the quasi-riot of May 24<sup>th</sup>), in demands, and in the construction of democratic structures parallel to the hierarchy in the workplace. Today, *political* democracy is already present, one is no longer stirred by it. But *social* democracy can still mobilise energies, towards the goal of completing political democracy, and of finally establishing a real and non-formal democracy, through introducing a space for deliberation into the business, the school, the district, etc.

Everywhere, '68 was a vast taking up of speech by the « interested parties », though they never ceased acting as *users*, perpetually concerned about reorganising the places – subway, campsite, business – where Capital had placed them.

However it would be facile and misleading to reduce May '68 to something insignificant. The movement took on everything, but only reordered each element of the whole, which itself was not attacked. This beginning of the return of revolution testified to a lucidity, but in negative form. There was no « dual power »

but, at the climactic point of the strike with De Gaulle's speech on May 30<sup>th</sup>, a dual absence of power. Neither government or strikers controlled the situation, nor were they certain of controlling themselves (De Gaulle was obliged to go and verify the loyalty of the army). Bizarrely, at a time when people spoke so much of management, one saw that the workers *disassociated themselves from all strike administration*. Abandoning control of the factories to the trade unions was a sign of weakness, but also of the fact that they were conscious that the problem lay elsewhere. Five years later, in 1973, in a big strike at Laval, workers purely and simply left the factory for three weeks. Like the « de-politicization » of which so much has been said, this loss of interest in the company, in work and in its reorganisation, is ambivalent, and cannot be interpreted except in relation to everything else. Communism was certainly present in 1968, but only in relief, in negative. At Nantes in 1968, and later at SEAT at Barcelona (1971) or Quebec (1972), strikers would take over districts or cities, go as far as seizing radio stations, but would make nothing of it : the self-organisation of proletarians « is possible, but at the same time, they have nothing to organise » (*Théorie communiste*, n° 4, 1981, p. 21).

In any event, proletarians did not create new political, trade union, or « unitary » organizations, as at the time of the German revolution. Sometimes they tried to build democratic structures, which fortunately would not survive the strike. But they didn't feel the need to give their strike a « soviet » form. Why ? The vehemence of their anti-union response testifies to the fact that in many factories they had the strength to impose democratic organs to manage the strike, if nothing more than that. They could have but they did not try to. Their problem lay elsewhere. The ambiguity of 68 lies here, in this refusal which is only a refusal. One cannot exist by default.

The radical minority left the enterprise and met with other minority elements, in the company of students, leftists and revolutionaries. The CMDO was one of the places where leftism was kept on the fringes. Censier was another. The first issue of *Mouvement Communiste* (1972) would make an analysis of its action. (One can also find much information in J. Baynac, *Mai Retrouvé*, Laffont, 1978, contradicting the democratic interpretations of its author.) The relative coherence of Censier, was due above all to the informal group La Vieille Taupe about which we have spoken, quickly reinforced by GLAT, (contrary to what is said, and not said, by Baynac, who also played an important role in this group [Vieille Taupe] as well as at Censier).

A little before 1968, in Issue 11 of its review, the Situationist International had responded to ultra-leftists that the Situationists did not care about gathering workers around them to undertake a permanent « workers » activity. The day when there was something to be done, said the S.I. the revolutionaries would be with the revolutionary workers. This is what happened.

Censier stimulated and coordinated the activity of radical, not to say revolutionary, minorities, in numerous firms. The critique of the trade unions, timid at first, became more scathing at the end of the strikes. The extremist fractions, who were isolated in the workplace, found a meeting place there. On the whole, the debate which was inaugurated at Censier escaped the torrent of empty phrases which often poured out elsewhere and demonstrated great lucidity, as testified by the *Rapport d'orientation* of May 21<sup>st</sup>, written by three people, at least two of them from GLAT, and perhaps a fourth (Kayatti, a member of the S.I.) (Baynac, pp. 161-63).

Where many would come to see Censier as a lesson in democracy, at the time we saw a lesson about democracy : a demonstration of the superficial character of the opposition between individual-bourgeois democracy and collective-workers democracy. The problem of minority-majority only arose for the members of ICO who were also present in Censier, but who refused to join the activities of a minority that risked imposing itself on the mass. The sterility of councillist logic !

May 68 did not pose the question of communism. The gifts of provisions to the strikers testified to a solidarity, not to the beginning of the decay of market exchange. The communist perspective existed in the undeniable relaxing of immediate relations, the breaking down of sociological barriers, the life without money for several weeks, the pleasure of acting together, in a word in this sketch of community which can be seen in every great social movement, even non-revolutionary ones (Orwell in Catalonia in 1936). The various committees which were based at Censier naturally debated what to do, and what was necessary in order to go further. It is not so common that large assemblies numbering many workers discuss communism.

The leaflet *Que faire ?*, about 100,000 copies of which were republished and distributed, recommended what the movement needed to do to go further, or even just continue : take a number of simple measures which broke with capitalist logic, in order that the strike could show its capacity to make society function *differently*; meet social needs (which would rally the hesitant and the middle class who were worried by the violence – the product of a deadlock, an impotent reaction in the face of an impasse) through free provision of transport, health care, food, through the collective management of distribution centres, through striking against payments (rent, taxes, bills); and show that the bourgeoisie and the state are useless.

Communism was only present in 1968 as a vision. Even the workers hostile to the trade unions didn't take the next step, the revolutionary elements among them being the exception rather than the rule. An additional proof of weakness was the confusion surrounding the rally at Charléty at the end of May. Charléty was a political attempt to go further, through an extension of the social movement at the level of state power. Charléty was where many of the leftists were to be found, but also the left of the trade unions (in particular the CFDT), and where we also saw a celebrity who people had recently wanted to make a national hero, the De Gaulle of the left : Mendès-France. Charléty was the peak of the consciousness and political realism which the « May movement » gave evidence of. On one side, the dream : councils. On the other, the reality : a real reforming government, where many saw themselves playing the role of Lenin to this Mendès-Kerensky. We can smile about it today, but if the Mendès solution had carried the day, many protestors would have supported it. One year later, two young workers who produced a leaflet with *La Vieille Taupe* recalling the revolutionary scope of May 68, stated : « We will not forget Charléty ». . . In 1981, the election of a Socialist President, Mitterand, would finally realise the hopes of Charléty.

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## After May

After the end of the strike we all made the mistake of counting on a clarification taking place. This misread the nature of the movement, and forgot that in periods of revolution – or of shocks like 1968 – all organisations and ideologies prosper, including the counter-revolutionaries.

Leftism, in particular, came to attribute false revolutionary goals to a « dress rehearsal », which in reality had not taken place. However the post-May period could only be counter-revolutionary, a demand for liberty in all directions, including in relation to the revolutionary movement. Since the explosion had not modified the fundamental structures, its energies dispersed in opposing outdated institutions, social mores, etc.

Taking the place of Stalinism, leftism pushed capitalist dispossession to extremes, while presenting itself as the remedy for that dispossession. Capitalised man is deprived of roots. The leftist readopted this dis-identification. Living in another world, the militant projected himself into another self, « at the side of the proletariat », « with the socialist countries » or « for the third world ». The crisis of leftism some years later, triggered the opposite phenomenon : the search for identity. Henceforth everyone would now « search » for the particular group within which they would find their « natural » roots (feminism, regionalism, homosexual identity, etc).

All ideologies were revitalised, Leninism just as much as anarchism. We should not regret their current decline. This bedlam of illusions naturally led to their auto-critique : people passed on from militancy to everyday life. If « the individual is the form par excellence of bourgeois existence, and egoism [...] the essence [...] of present day society [...] dispersed in atoms » (Marx), bourgeois society also always reunites those atoms into groups. The privatisation of life, and the increasing difficulty in having any collective non commercial activity, entails a polarisation, where people either tend to deny themselves as persons, in order to no longer exist except inside a group, or else refuse all organisation in order to live only as individuals. A false alternative is posed : is man initially « himself » or is he « social » ? Is activity menaced more by individualism or by the group racket ? The idea that it's only *interior* life or everyday life that matters merely inverts the idea of the militant, that one must intervene on what is *external*, not on oneself, without making any critique of it.

Militancy and the activism of everyday life engage with one another like a warring couple who will never separate. Moral critiques of the militant miss their target. The militant is not just a « poor bloke », starved of affection. Militancy is the unavoidable illusion of the possibility of activity in a world which makes it almost impossible, it's a mystified means to escape the dominant passivity. You seek to act for a reason other than your own condition, you step out of yourself, you find a dynamism in realities or ideas that are external to your own life : « the proletariat » or « the revolution » or, to be more modern : « radicality » or « desire ».

After May people criticised everything, except the cement binding the whole

together, the totality itself. The absence of an offensive at the centre of social gravity obliged critiques from every point of the compass each to respect the limits of its own production. Within a different general framework they would all have produced something else; with nothing leading towards a revolution, they ebbed away. These neo-reformisms were different from their predecessors : where the latter had had a project at the level of society (to reorganise it around work, constituted as a unified force), these gave up trying to change society in order to merely arrange a free space within it.

The « liberation » of women, of sexuality, of mores, etc., is a fragmentation. Within themselves people separate one function from the others. Instead of going towards total, multiple being, people divide themselves up, understand and defend themselves by turns as woman, as consumer, as producer, as Breton, etc., whereas the interests of these different categories *oppose* one another. People succeed in the amazing feat of creating *within themselves* the divisions which Capital endeavours to maintain within the proletariat.

In France, wherever self-organisation in the workplace had been established, it collapsed after June 1968. The Italian « hot autumn » [in French « mai rampant » - trans] of 1969-70 saw the emergence of councils, which even the head of the CGIL trade-union confederation recognised had become transformed into para-trade-union institutions. These councils did not succeed in constituting themselves as mass organisations embracing the whole of social life, gathering together, not just producers, but the whole working population. There was no longer a place for a traditional workers movement of that kind. The modernist CFDT-style hope of a new working class that recomposed the unity of work, and was capable of managing it, shattered on the reality of the need for that numerous, malleable and not very skilled strata, which is always necessary for Capital. Self-management only served to make believe that it was possible.

« The Italian situation proceeds more slowly and ultimately reveals its tendencies. »

« The first phase lasted from 1968 to the winter of 1971. The main element was the birth of workers' struggles independent of the influence of unions and political organisations. Workers' action committees were formed as in France, with one essential difference : the French ones were quickly driven out of the factories by the power of the unions, which in practice compelled them to have no illusions about the boundaries of the factory. In so far as the general situation did not allow them to go any further, they disappeared. In Italy, on the other hand, workers' committees were at first able to organise themselves inside the factories. (...) Many committees were formed in the factories, in isolation from each other, and they all began to question the speed of the line and to organise sabotage. »

« (...) The workers' struggle itself met no resistance. This was in fact what disarmed it. It could do nothing but adapt to the conditions of capitalist society. The unions, for their part, (...) reshaped their factory organisations according to the pattern of the "autonomous" committees which appeared in recent struggles. »

*Le Mouvement Communiste*, n° 1, 1972 : « En quoi la perspective

communiste réapparaît. »

« (...) the more the importance of the sectors of research, of creation and of monitoring develops, the more human work is concentrated in the preparation and organisation of production, the more the sense of initiative and of responsibility increases, in a word, the more the modern worker reconquers, at the collective level, the professional autonomy he has lost in the phase of the mechanisation of work, the more the tendencies towards demands for management develop. »

(S. Mallet, *La nouvelle classe ouvrière*, 1963)

(Twenty years after Mallet's theses, we can take note that trade unionists, reformers and experts continue to inform us of a new kind of industrial work in which the worker will escape his alienation, this time thanks to robots. We intend to write an article about this evolution.)

Even before the recapture of Censier by the police (July 1968), the committees which met there had formed Inter-Enterprises, which continued to meet for several months, bringing together informal delegates (not explicitly mandated by their comrades) of the extremist workers minorities. The Inter-Enterprises were more a place of exchange and discussion than an active coordination. La Vieille Taupe, GLAT and ICO participated. At the same time an attempt at collaboration between La Vieille Taupe and GLAT ended in complete failure. The regular meetings and debates of the Inter-Enterprises, while they seldom led to collective action in the companies concerned, prepared the ground within peoples heads, continuing the discussions started in May and June. The leftists themselves made « concrete » proposals : to organize struggles . . . At the same time the very name Inter-Enterprise indicated their limits (that is to say those of May 68) : this was not a communist organisation, only the means of a transition to something else which, for the time being, was not imminent.

Of course the disappearance of the Inter-Enterprises did not mean the end of self-organisation by a minority of workers, or of their conflicts with the trade union apparatuses. The Committees of Action continued to bring together protesting employees and radical and leftist elements. Little by little, part of the workers ceased taking part in these activities. Several dozen members or sympathisers of the Comité Hachette d'Action Révolutionnaire, still members of the CGT, came one after another at a union meeting to leave their union cards on the platform. But a few weeks later, the majority joined the CFDT.

A small number of active elements in the Committees of Action wanted to act on a different, revolutionary, basis and sought to discover this. La Vieille Taupe was one of the poles around which they met. It also brought into contact people from the same country (Italy), who had not previously known one another.

The Situationist International progressively disappeared. Before 1968 it had been the public affirmation of a future revolution. Afterwards it affirmed the arrival of the revolution in 1968. The democracy of the councils had been the dream of May. Instead of seeing in this the limits of May, the S.I. read into it a proof that councillism was correct. The theory of councils was appropriate to the French and Italian strikes, but inadequate for a revolutionary movement which would go beyond the limits of those strikes. To accelerate things the S.I. called for a devising

of scandals, of workers « Strasbourgs ». It congealed around self-management, and became the herald of what existed by disguising it as revolution : Italy, Portugal. Incapable of drawing up its own self assessment, it substituted for this a mania for judging failures of the morality which it flaunted and imposed : radicality. « I will kill everyone and then I will leave » said Ubu. When he had judged and condemned nearly everybody, there remained nothing more for Debord but to perpetuate *The Society of the Spectacle* by turning it into images, then in his last film, « In girum nocte... » , to exalt a nostalgia that people would either find touching or annoying, and once again to cultivate his distinctiveness. During this period the revolutionary movement was assimilating what was essential in the S.I., while its mere disciples drew from it a justification for an art of living which became one with all the other so called « alternative » forms of life. « That is why we adopted what was (at that moment) the extremest variety, which by vigorous dialectic had succeeded, through the logic of its revolutionism, in discarding the necessity for revolution. » (Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, OUP, 1963, p. 18).

The theoretical deepening within the work of a minority that was small, but linked to a fraction of radical workers, themselves little capable of positive action in their workplaces, spread not just to Italy and Spain but to modern capitalist countries (Scandinavia, the United States). We became aware of crossing over to a qualitatively new stage. The re-evaluation of the heritage of the German left, and the assimilation of what was best in the Italian left, was tackled publicly by La Vieille Taupe in 1969 in a text on the ideology of the ultra-left, written for a national and international meeting of *Information et Correspondance Ouvrieres* (ICO). This pivotal text was important for those who recognised themselves in it, but the attempt to debate with the « councillists » (ICO, Mattick. . .) came to a sudden halt. At the same time the International Communist Party (PCI), the straight-jacket which imprisoned the Italian left, entered a crisis which led two years later to the splitting away of the Scandinavians, over the German left's view of the trade-union question.

Although it was not clearly expressed, the point of convergence was the conviction that the proletariat does not have to install itself as a social force before changing the world. There is thus no workers organisation to create, to arouse or to hope for. There is no transitional mode of production between capitalism and communism. *There is no autonomous proletarian organisation outside of what the proletariat does in order to communise the world and itself with it.* There is therefore no problem of revolutionaries being interior or exterior in relation to the proletariat.

This conviction was enough to move us away from groups like *Révolution Internationale* (formed in 1968) which after a councillor phase, took up part of the heritage of the Italian left, *Bilan* and *Internationalisme* (after 1945). An example of failed synthesis, allying a councillor bias to a fetishism of the organisation, under the name International Communist Current (ICC) the group quickly sank into the life of a sect, comparable to the [Bordigist] International Communist Party, always in *competition* with other groups.

Between 1968 and 1972, La Vieille Taupe was undoubtedly the point of contact, and *Invariance* (led by Camatte) the theoretical catalyst for this convergence between France, Italy and Scandinavia. Thus in 1969, issues 6 & 7 of the first series of *Invariance*, reinterpreted a century of the revolutionary movement by reintegrating

the German left into it. However the stimulative role played by *Invariance* did not eliminate its original idealism, for it conceived of the proletariat more as a historic entity than as the product of real relations and situations. This re-appropriation of the past was not the work of archivists; some proletarians took part in it for the same reasons as the others. Pierre Guillaume could thus characterise the functioning of our community at that time : when someone, who has the advantage over others of having read a revolutionary text from the past, makes a historical exposition of it, then if he is clear, his audience will know as much as him : he is no more than « the agent of the details ».

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## Nineteen Seventy-Two

The refusal to form a group, delimiting an interior and an exterior, allowed those who met at La Vieille Taupe to move towards a common coherence which others only possessed on paper. Within this theoretical and practical community, a certain dynamic was at work, which put everyone on an equal footing while integrating abilities and various nuances of opinion. This collectivity, which for convenience, we will call La Vieille Taupe, advanced step by step, each time associating those who approved of the particular action being undertaken, without them having to agree on a « programme » or a « platform ». But of course, if somebody proposed such and such action to this or that person, it was because they thought they had more in common with them than just a desire for action. La Vieille Taupe didn't try to make a name for itself : our acts were our signature. Common activity was based on a consensus which was often experienced as inspiring : there were things to be done and said, and people often understood one another very quickly. The absence of voting, and of legalism, gave the feeling of an activity close to what one could consider as communist. Psychology, the discussion of states of feeling and the influence of character and emotional « problems » , were rejected.

This form of organisation encouraged irresponsibility. A questionable text might be distributed, a harmful initiative taken, without people coming to any necessary reservations or rectifications, because the group didn't have a definite existence. The most active individual, Pierre Guillaume, was thus the least controlled by the common activity. As for the absence of psychology, if we think of this with melancholy when we see what a soup so many among us now swim in, and when we see the extent to which disturbed behaviour became important in the subsequent evolution, and in the splits which punctuated it, we should also not forget that this refusal was in part a blindness which sometimes led us to tolerate behaviour we would no longer put up with today.

If the absence of formalism stopped us succumbing to the diseases of sects : doctrinal sclerosis and the organisation of organisation, the lack of clearly defined perspectives, which we might have agreed on after a more formal discussion, had the disadvantage of hindering a critique of our activities, for this could not be based on any formulated agreement. It's true that this effort of formulation would have inevitably deprived us of the support of part of the elements which circulated around La Vieille Taupe. And it is not certain that this would have been a good thing : we would perhaps have gained in precision, but a creative profusion would have been lost, which only later bore fruit, in our heads, and in those of others.

Nevertheless, this vagueness facilitated a Stalinophobic mania which came close to making anti-Stalinism a requirement in the same way that antifascism was for others (if it was against the Communist Party and the USSR, it could not be bad...). Its necessary to say again that hostility to the Communist Party, like hostility to NATO, can be anti-revolutionary. For the communist movement there is no « enemy number one of the peoples of the world ».

It ended up that La Vieille Taupe devoted much energy to placing « banana skins » under the feet of Stalinists in order to throw them off balance, and that it devoted

much effort to scandalous acts, attacks on a single terrain : that of ideology, which the enemy had controlled for far too long without being seriously threatened. A violent action that doesn't include within itself its meaning (comprehensible to those with whom you have something in common, and to whom you address yourself) plays the enemies game. Writing « Too many murderers (*massacreurs*) decorate this wall with flowers » on the mur des Fédérés [a memorial to the dead of the Paris commune in Père Lachaise cemetery, which was itself the site of the final resistance and subsequent massacre of the communards on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1871. The memorial was used as a place of annual pilgrimage for the French Communist Party - translators note], is an act which contains within itself its impact, and whose significance cannot be misunderstood except through bad faith or from an obvious lack of interest in the issue. But a violent attack which doesn't inscribe within itself a possible clarification will be given its meaning by the political powers, or by the media, and *from the outside*.

If a blow aimed at representations, (for example, the myth which the Communist party maintains about itself), is addressed to radicals, it can retain its meaning, and encourage the silent majority. But if it attempts to address everyone, and change public opinion about the Communist Party, it will simultaneously fail to reach both general and minority consciousness. Yet La Vieille Taupe practised scandal without being able to discuss it, except on rare occasions, and to little effect.

In France, 1972 was a turning point. The year saw the apogee of leftism and the last important occurrence of the anti-statist, anti-political and anti-repressive demonstrations which had appeared in 1968. The funeral of Overney was the climax after which everything fell apart. It was a large anti-Communist Party gathering : Overney, a maoist militant, had been shot at the gates of Renault by the employers private police, and Marchais [general secretary of the Communist Party] had not been able to restrain this heartfelt cry : « We are not going to start again as in 68 ... ». The leftist stewards could hardly contain this enormous demonstration, shot through with a riotous atmosphere, but unable to set goals for itself. We saw one of our number, his voice competing with the megaphones, recapture the slogan of the demonstration from the Trotskyist stewards : « Marchais, bastard, the people will have your hide », before the underlings intervened with a cry of « no anti-communism ». In its violence, this slogan nonetheless showed the limits of the demonstration. Within leftism, one part of Maoism developed an anti-trade union and anti-Communist Party line, but within a logic that was antifascist, populist and democratic.

Coming after a theoretical breakthrough in the work of revolutionaries, the demonstration was interpreted as a sign of the appearance (finally) of a radical current beyond leftism. A series of groups were born at this time : in particular *Négation* in Paris and *Intervention communiste* (which was to become *Théorie communiste*) in Aix. La Vieille Taupe prepared to publish several texts, one of which was *En quoi la perspective communiste réapparaît* by François Martin, developed from several texts from 1968 and afterwards. Continuing the discussions which had followed Overney's funeral, at which a Vieille Taupe leaflet had been well received, a number of workers who for a long time had taken part in our activities criticized the lack of follow up to our action, and called for the creation of a more coherent group. The leaflets, the theoretical texts such as those by Denis Authier (preface to Trotsky's *Report of the Siberian Delegation*, for Spartacus), by Gilles Dauvé, under the name Jean Barrot, and by Pierre Guillaume, and the informal contacts, were no

longer enough they said. Thus Mouvement Communiste saw the light of day, with a bulletin of the same name, of which François Martin's text formed the first issue, and *Capitalism and Communism* the second. Five hundred copies of each were published (a further 1000 copies of No 2 almost immediately afterwards), and they were distributed in a few days, the greater part by direct contact, notably at workplaces (Renault). We had the impression of moving forward.

The theoretical clarification, and the confluence between groups in several countries, had created belief in the birth of a movement, few in number, but coherent, able to make itself known, and to maintain a minimum of active relations with the proletarian experience. Perhaps we were right about the clarification taking place, but we were certainly wrong about the formation of centres capable of reflection and even of action. Overnay's funeral was one of the illusions of May, of which it formed the last gasp, and by no means the sign of a renewal. Even those who had pushed for the formation of Mouvement Communiste dissociated themselves from it almost at once. The links established with *Négation* did not last. Our links with the more modern countries cooled and the only close contacts we maintained were in Italy and Spain. The global proletarian activity had facilitated the encounter and accumulation of points of view which were often in sympathy, but it was not strong enough to impose a synthesis which would have provided a better grasp of the present : we did not get beyond an understanding of the past.

In these conditions, the book *Le Mouvement Communiste* (Champ Libre, 1972), which came out at the same time, could not be satisfactory. It was a text by Gilles Dauvé, not of La Vieille Taupe or the group Mouvement Communiste, which had hardly discussed or improved it. As the forward to the Portuguese edition (1975) has already put it, the work was an inadequate theorization, as partial, in its way, as most texts at that time. Re-reading Marx in the footsteps of *Invariance* and Bordiga, the book neglected to include Marx himself in its global critique. Its concern to describe objective « laws » made it forget real relations. « Value » no longer seemed to be the expression of social relations, but tended to personify itself, and become a subject of history like the « communist movement » , whereas value and communist movement are only theoretical constructions which approach reality. The book constructed an integrated model of contradictions instead of illuminating them on the basis of practise. On closing the book, one might believe in the existence of a proletarian movement automatically set in motion by the « obsolescence » of value. Today it seems to us that the link between capitalism and communism, and between Capital and proletariat, is far from being as clear as we put it then. Communist transformation was presented as a series of measures to be taken. While we said that it was a question of a movement, we didn't show in detail the subversive effects of such immediate measures. Abstract analysis of the real conditions, and idealism.

The Scandinavian split in the [Bordigist] PCI in 1971 triggered the departure of part of the members of the French section. The crisis of militancy, endemic within all political groups, did not orient these ex-militants towards revolutionary action (which would it would first have been necessary to define). It propelled them towards a search for « life » in which they got lost. Their evolution conformed to a process we often saw at work in our ranks : a kind of « life-cycle of the revolutionary ». On the basis of an instinctive rejection of established society, people pass from existential revolt to organised activity for revolution, through a series of breaks which lead more and more to the left. They make a critique of

everything, of all forms of existence and proletarian intervention, of the whole of the revolutionary or pseudo-revolutionary past, glorified and deformed, until a limit point is reached where the critique of everything also includes revolution and proletariat which they end up rejecting as myths, unless, that is, they theorize them as nothing more than abstract identities, philosophical concepts out of reach of human action.

*Invariance* had obviously played a part in the crisis of the PCI, but its own evolution, reflecting the quasi-general disarray, only contributed to a lack of progress by some, and to a take-off into hyperspace by others. Camatte, in taking up Marx's phrase well summarized the contradiction of the proletariat : « a class of capitalist society that is not of capitalist society » (Series III, 1979, pp. 55-56). But he resolved this contradiction in a strange manner : first the class is the party-community, then the party is the class-community, and thus a universal class, and finally it is humanity. Camatte had initially relocated the failing class in the « party ». Instead of going on from there to what it is that creates the proletariat, its experience, and its contradictions, *Invariance* then relocated the party into being the whole of humanity. The metaphysics of humanity replaced that of the party. But it always remained a matter of a mediation between revolution and the activity of men, because what it was in their practice which could generate a revolution was poorly discerned.

*Invariance* translated into its own language capitalist omnipresence. Camatte so well understood the absorption of the world by this impersonal monster that he succumbed to its fascination, to the point of seeing it everywhere. If Capital swallows everything, then proletarians in their turn make themselves into cannibals, and their struggle nourishes Capital with their flesh. *Invariance* showed how structuralism expressed the strength of a system which in eternalising itself denied history. In its turn, incapable of seeing in barbarism anything other than barbarism, it no longer distinguished anything more than a totality within which all previous distinctions (classes, production/circulation, etc.) had been erased.

The second and third series of *Invariance* theorised a visible reality which we run up against painfully : the omnipresence of Capital. According to *Invariance*, against a totalitarian being which occupies the entire social terrain, another subterranean, but equally omnipresent, reality would oppose itself : the uprising of life.

Traditional revolutionary thought avoided speculation about the survival of Capital by assigning it to external causes (social democracy, imperialism, etc). *Invariance* resorted to an *interiorization* : Capital survives because it has entered into us. The economic « death crisis » is replaced by a revolt of our nature which has been scorned by Capital.

For *Invariance*, apart from this human nature, this something within us which refuses to submit itself, Capital absorbs everything. This is to forget that absorption must enter through the real relations between humans. The opposition is not between an activity, that is capitalised through and through, and human nature : if there is an opposition, it is necessarily within capitalist activity itself, precisely because it is set in motion by proletarians. It is this very activity that is contradictory and perhaps offers an exit. The solution lies in the social relation, not elsewhere.

« The worker himself is a Capital, a commodity... » (Marx), but he is not these things passively. *Invariance* understood that Capital does not proceed by itself, but through our own action. But Camatte concluded from this that Capital had therefore triumphed for good : it had made itself us, it incorporated us. However it is precisely through this activity which it imposes on us that Capital is contradictory. As Lefort said in the article previously cited, proletarians are in a situation of universality.

With regard to Camatte who believes that the revolutionary movement, in the sense we give these words, is dead, and who believes that the *new* reality of Capital has removed any validity from the concepts of proletariat and revolution, we should not take refuge in an attitude of rigid contempt. Revolutionaries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century justifiably affirmed, against « revisionism », that *nothing essential* had changed since 1848. In 1914 however, (i.e. too late), they realised that all the same *something* had indeed changed : the labour movement had become an instrument of Capital. Revolutionaries should have recognised then that revisionism was the expression of real problems which their refutation by itself had neglected. Camatte formerly provided many elements for revolutionary theory in our time. Today he poses a real question badly. His wandering illustrates the ambiguity of the period.

Castoriadis and Camatte saw in Capital something which devours everything, and concluded by invalidating the concepts differentiating the parts of Capital, to leave in place, in the work of one, a bureaucratic pyramid, in the work of the other, an indefinable totality which simultaneously integrates the human being and yet doesn't succeed in this. These are the thinkers of the new face of Capital, of the end of the labour movement and the absence of the revolutionary movement : because the latter does not display the characteristics which one might have imagined in the 1960s, they have cut themselves adrift from the moorings.

A group like the *Organisation des Jeunes Travailleurs révolutionnaires*, who notably published *Militancy - highest stage of alienation* in 1972, went against this trend of « every man for himself ». Initially marked by the *Situationist International*, they became acquainted with the communist left, and effected a convergence with La Vieille Taupe.

*Mouvement Communiste* had not achieved a satisfactory collective functioning, any more than La Vieille Taupe had. It became an organ for publishing texts by Gilles Dauvé, amended by a few people. After difficult discussions with *Négation* and others about what we could agree to do, and a polemic about a memorial meeting for Leon Blum which we had disrupted, we realised there was a crisis in our ranks. The fourth issue of *Mouvement Communiste* « Révolutionnaire ? » (1973) contained some valid remarks, together with others which were distorted, on the subject of subversive action and the community. But it especially testified to a revealing displacement in the centre of interest : it no longer considered the proletarians, but the revolutionaries. Its hardly surprising that this text proposed no real remedy for what was not a disease but the state of the movement.

A « milieu » had aimed at constituting itself around a communist *ideology*, with its own slogans (« abolition of wage labour », « crisis of value » ) in place of those of the leftists. Noting that it no longer performed the role of a meeting place, and instead entertained a *clientele* like any other bookstore, the bookshop La Vieille

Taupe closed at the end of 1972.

« All the elements of revolutionary theory exist in the marketplace, but not their instructions for use.

This is not the province of a bookshop.

*Revolutionary theory cannot exist apart from the establishment of practical links in order to act and this action can no longer principally be the affirmation and dissemination of revolutionary theory.*

(...) La Vieille Taupe must disappear. »

(*Bail à céder*, [Lease for sale] La Vieille Taupe poster, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1972)

Before 1968 there were groups unable to distribute their theory beyond a circle of initiates. This was the reason for existence of the bookshop. In 1972, revolutionary ideas circulated, amongst other reasons because society needed revolutionary theory to understand and adjust its contradictions. But any collective revolutionary effort was, and remained, extremely fragile.

Failing to politicise workplace conflicts, after 1968 leftism had not succeeded in its passage from the *factories* to the corridors of *power*, and had withdrawn into struggles outside work, struggles around *everyday life* (typical was the Maoist group Vive La Révolution (VLR) and its journal *Ce que nous voulons : Tout ! What do we want : Everything!*). After 1972, politics declined and the various neo-reformisms of everyday life flourished. Compared to leftist specialists in power, these movements, in one sense, posed real problems. But each became bogged down in its own speciality. By comparison the « communist » milieu had a global point of view to oppose to theirs which seemed like their opposite : more like a political discourse, a more distinctive point of view, but unlike the others absolutely ineffective. All partial critique was false, but the global critique lacked any point of application.

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## The Puig Antich affair

A social movement reappeared in Spain during the final years of Francoism. Strikes followed one another, and repression only intensified them. From the example of what had occurred in France, the need for a theory of revolution for the current period created a renewal of interest in the revolutionary past, Spain in 1936-39, May 37 in Barcelona, and also their German and Italian forebears. But this theoretical effort was accompanied by armed struggle, sparked off by the encounter of official violence with revolutionary impatience. The opposition of broad fractions of the population to a dictatorship which was unsuited to modern capitalism, nourished within a number of revolutionaries a belief in the virtue of example, or the necessity to create a « fire » around which proletarian energies would concentrate themselves.

The comrades with whom we were in contact were engaged in a double process of clarification and confusion. *La Vieille Taupe* had for some years been in contact with a group that had given rise to the Mouvement de Libération Ibérique (MIL), which had published a translation of *Notes for an Analysis of the Russian Revolution* (an ultra-left text by G. Dauvé from 1967), and many other texts written by people either close to *La Vieille Taupe* or who frequented the shop. The MIL possessed the dual structure one generally finds in those organisations (like the IRA or ETA) which seek to replace the state : a political wing and a military wing. The first supported strikes and published texts, etc., the second practised hold-ups and bombings.

A fundamental error of *La Vieille Taupe* and *Mouvement Communiste* was not to have clarified their relations with the groups they met, particularly the foreign ones. We debated with them and we criticized errors, but if this criticism was accepted (often only in words), a formal agreement then sealed a collaboration which left unacceptable positions in the shadows. For example, the requirements of anti-Stalinism involved us in distributing democratic leaflets about Czechoslovakia in 1970. And for a long time we maintained a not very critical relationship with a small Mexican party which, it transpired, sometimes participated in elections.

We knew about the illegal activities of the MIL. We had not warned it strictly enough against the process which its practise placed it in, and against the transformation of its members into professional revolutionaries, unable to live other than through hold-ups, more and more disconnected from the social movement, and using communist ideas as an ideology, a justification for an activity which too closely resembled that of Leninist groups.

Puig Antich, who wanted to stop armed actions, and sought to convince the others to follow him, was arrested in October 1973 with several other members of the MIL. They faced the death penalty. Members of the MIL asked *Mouvement Communiste* for help in breaking the wall of silence which surrounded these arrests, thus avoiding a speedy trial and condemnation in the general indifference about them.

Two types of action were carried out in parallel. On the one hand, we endeavoured to counter the account given by the Spanish State which presented Puig and his comrades as gangsters : this struggle took the form of the Vidal-Naquet committee

(a traditional committee of democratic personalities). In addition to this it was necessary to say what we thought of the affair as revolutionaries (amongst other things this took the form of issue 6 of *Mouvement Communiste*). Pierre Guillaume, who four months later was to declare that this was not a good text, devoted himself almost exclusively to contacting personalities and journalists to put pressure on Franco. There was rapidly a separation between these two activities. Could it have been otherwise ?

In any event, the revolutionary milieu either attacked us (*Négation, Révolution Internationale*), or remained indifferent, (GLAT). They accused *Mouvement Communiste* of having one foot in anti-fascism. *Le Fléau Social*, which had emerged from the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire and broken with it, was the only organized group which supported us. Puig Antich was executed, primarily no doubt because of the successful assassination of Carrero Blanco, the Spanish prime minister, by ETA. But even if he had lived, the assessment of this affair could only have been negative : *Mouvement Communiste* had failed to clarify the questions of violence and revolutionary solidarity, and had failed to make its point of view intelligible to French and Spanish revolutionaries.

Revolutionaries don't need martyrs. Communism is also made through spontaneous solidarity. Our activity involves a fraternity without which it loses its content. We are not an army which moves pawns around : and this remains true even in the military phases of a revolution.

However as we have already said (see: *For a World without Moral Order*), for us biological survival is not an absolute value. In the enthusiasm of an insurrection, the concept of sacrifice loses any meaning because the insurgents place themselves in the forefront of danger. But outside of such a period of massive confrontation ? How do we express our solidarity with a revolutionary threatened with death without altering the meaning of his activity ? There is no precise answer to this question. We can only set out some basic principles.

There is no such thing as a revolutionary purity which can be irredeemably sullied by the smallest compromise. Puig Antich preferred to be saved by bourgeois intervention than die in « revolutionary purity ». No-one in our ranks would have dreamed of opposing the fact that some bourgeois democrats intervened to try and save his life. But the whole point was to know how to bring about such interventions. It's necessary to take up the word democracy, and act in such a way that the democrats do their work, but without concealing what we think of the democratic version of capitalism : easier said than done. Revolutionaries cannot arouse public opinion for when you place yourself on that terrain you cease being a revolutionary. You can write to a newspaper to exert pressure on behalf of someone, but never in order to put over basic positions.

We have no cult of heroes and if a comrade disavowed his beliefs in a time of danger, we would no more judge him than we would all those proletarians who « agree » every day to subject themselves to the dictatorship of wage labour. Simply, he would fall outside our common activity. In the case of Puig it was one thing to contact this or that personality to outline the truth, it was quite another to form a committee which inevitably would live its life as a committee, and take on an existence of its own, thereby crossing a limit beyond which democratic logic overrode everything else. While he doesn't seek death, and while he doesn't

hesitate to benefit from the contradictions of his enemies (in this case the struggle between democracy and dictatorship), the radical in the war against social order cannot suddenly act as if he will no longer take part, simply because he risks losing his life, except at the risk of his activity losing any impact.

There was a fundamental ambiguity in this struggle, for trying to save Puig and his comrades by trying to win recognition of their politics and refusing the label « gangster » meant wanting to substitute one label for another, and if Puig was a radical, he could hardly see himself in the status of « political » prisoner, something we had reproached the French Maoists for demanding. If we were going to struggle on the terrain of democracy, the minimum would perhaps have been to proclaim that we didn't dissociate the case of Puig from that of the others condemned to die by francoism. And in fact, for good measure, Franco executed an « ordinary prisoner » at the same time as Puig. This unhappy individual, far more than Puig, was the butt of this sick joke.

Our lack of clarity on this point was only one of a whole series of errors. The error of the short initial text, written by Pierre Guillaume and approved by *Mouvement Communiste*, which presented the affair to the newspapers in a version halfway between our positions and what it was necessary to say in order to be heard. The error of the inadequate 6<sup>th</sup> issue of *Mouvement Communiste*, which justified the violence of the MIL by its Spanish context, and criticised only the escalation of the violence, when the violence itself was wrong. The error above all of our presence in or behind the Vidal-Naquet committee.

Issue 6 of *Mouvement Communiste* was the last. The pitiful Spanish affair, in which it had failed on all counts, revealed the weakness of *Mouvement Communiste*, made worse by the fact that it did not draw up any assessment of its activity. G. Dauvé's pamphlet *Violence and Revolutionary Solidarity* (1974) endeavoured to take stock. The criticisms it contained were never discussed between the ex-« members » of *Mouvement Communiste*. This text was only partly satisfactory for it did not tackle the actual principle of the activity in the Vidal-Naquet committee. It ended with the following programme :

- « 1. To take note of the non-community (at least provisional) with all kinds of people (...).
2. To refuse to give support to collective suicides. In practise, to break, not necessarily with those who make a different analysis of violence, but as a matter of principle with all those who are unable to give a clear definition of their own use of violence.
3. To take up theory, while developing, as far as one can, links and contacts.
4. In particular to undertake the analysis of the current communist movement. We would only displace the problem by centering it on those groups which failed (...). The important thing is to see what these failures were the sign and product of. »

Only the first two points were achieved in the years which followed. *La Banquise* attempts to apply the two latter, *mutatis mutandis*. [*changing those things that have to be changed*]

The lack of a common political line, as well as the lack of development of principles of revolutionary action, had expressed itself in 1972 and before then through an uncoordinated agitation. In 1973, when *Mouvement Communiste* was confronted with a question of life or death, these absences appeared fatal. The ties between the people who had produced *Mouvement Communiste* became strained. If the actions of the group were open to criticism the inertia of the rest of the revolutionary movement confronted with the Spanish affair was no better. But the inability of this milieu to take a common position on the issue, and to conduct a collective activity which could have come down to the distribution of texts, still had nothing to do with the drift into terrorism which took the form of GARI.

re-collecting our past (15)  
history and personal narrative of the last fifteen years

## Crisis and Autonomy

Economic crisis has been overused to explain anything and everything. Working class support for capitalism was successively explained by prosperity (the carrot of wage rises) and by depression (the stick of unemployment). Within our current some believed that crisis could only « fuel » the proletarian subversion which emerged around 1968. Not because misery would drive proletarians to revolt, but because the crisis « revealed the fragility of the system and multiplied the opportunities for intervention by the proletariat » (*King Kong International*, no 1. 1976, p. 3).

We don't say « long live the crisis ! » nor do we bid any premature « farewells » to Capital and proletariat. Some allow themselves to become obsessed by the crisis and closely monitor the fall in the rate of profit, as if beyond some critical threshold it would necessarily lead to a social outburst. However, the question of crises is not an economic question, and the fall in the rate of profit is only an indicator of the crisis of a social relation. When Marxism, adopting a capitalist point of view, wonders whether or not factories will close, it strips the crisis of its social impact.

In the Second International, as in the Third, people nearly always conceived of the class struggle as being external to the crisis. According to this conception, when the economy enters into crisis, it sets proletarians in motion, and what they then do has no relation to their existence within the class of wage earners. For theoretical communism, society is unitary, and class struggle, even reformist class struggle, contributes to the crisis, in which the proletariat either is, or is not, able to explode the social relations which constitute it.

« (...) Those who count on a crisis of overproduction, with its procession of tens of millions of unemployed in every country, in order to produce what they term "the awakening of the consciousness of the proletariat" , are very dangerously mistaken (...). The unemployed masses will seek work and only work, for which it is necessary to restore the poisonous circuit of commodities (...). Certainly, Lenin, Trotsky and even Marx believed they could detect revolutionary possibilities in the customary cyclical crises, but without ever considering them indispensable. Reality stood in opposition to that hope, very obviously during the last real crisis (1929-33) (...) unlike today the concrete problems of the communist revolution didn't take shape, distinctly, through all the relations of capitalism, which more and more are experienced as useless and intolerable constraints. It is from this, and not from the breakdown of economic functions that the proletariat must organise itself against the system. »

« Gambling on the crisis of overproduction means refusing to fight on any terrain other than that most advantageous to the enemy (...). The class actions which will awaken the revolutionary consciousness, first of tens of thousands of workers, and then of hundreds of millions, must be undertaken commencing from the conditions of labour, not of unemployment, and commencing from political conditions and the conditions of life under their multiple aspects (...). Today revolutionary practise takes as its starting point

the negation of all the functional aspects of capitalism, and must oppose to each of those problems the solutions of communist revolution. Since it's been the position for a long time that, whatever the capitalist economic situation, at least a fraction of the working class will not undertake this kind of struggle, there could be a crisis ten times greater than the last before revolutionary consciousness was restored. For there can be no consciousness, either within the proletariat, or among revolutionaries, outside the struggle to change those structures and superstructures which have become reactionary, and which oppress even when they function under perfect conditions. »

« What must act as a reagent on the working class is not the accident of a great crisis of overproduction which might make them regret the 10 or 12 hours of drudgery in the factory or office, but the crisis of the system of work and of capitalist association, which, itself, is permanent, knows no frontiers and *worsens even with an optimal growth of the system*. Its disastrous effects spare neither the industrialised nor the backward zones, Russia and its satellites no more than the United States. This is the most important asset of the world proletariat. It will render accounts better under « normal » conditions, where reality does not appear masked by a situation of famine » (G. Munis. Party-State. Stalinism. Revolution. Spartacus, 1975 pp. 96-97)

The deciding factor is never the take-off or inhibition of growth, but the configuration of the social forces involved. In 1917-21, the proletarian assault began during a political and economic crisis. After 1929, despite the ending of the economic boom (however limited) of the 1920s, the balance of power leaned heavily in favour of Capital, the western bourgeoisies as much as the counter-revolution in the USSR. Whereas in 1917-21 the proletariat had benefited (badly, but just the same...) from the politico-social oppositions, in 1929, it was unable to benefit from the depression. When the crisis of 1929 erupted, the principal wave of the proletarian assault had already ebbed, and at a global level the proletariat was beaten. Such is not the case today. However Munis's argument seems to have retained its value, as is shown by the behaviour of proletarians since 1974.

That year a crisis appeared for all to see which ever since then hasn't stopped deepening. It attacked proletarians both directly : their purchasing power decreased by 10% in the US in 1979 and 1980, as well as indirectly : unemployment reintroduced sharper competition between them and the children of the middle classes for low level employment. In contrast to the 1960s the previously protected core of wage workers (adult male nationals, that is to say skilled or unionised, or both) saw its benefits cut. In its turn it now also experienced a loss of job security. The bourgeoisie undermined the basis of its support in the workers milieu, it rationalised production by eliminating the least productive, and by allowing social services to deteriorate. In an earlier period it had attempted to increase rates of work to make up for lost productivity, something which had triggered many wildcat strikes at the start of the 70s. From now on it attempted to fundamentally restructure production. For the next seven years workers conducted defensive struggles which generally achieved partial success. Neither Capital or labour succeeded in imposing themselves, the latter merely reacting to the blows of the former. The capacity of the system to absorb these blows was striking.

The immediate issue in workers struggles was generally preserving wages and

employment intact. LIP was the most famous example of the characteristic phenomenon of this period : communal defence against factory closures. Such struggles, which constitute workers into communities based on the workplace and then confine them within it, had appeared before LIP, for example in the textile industry, and were not confined to France or even Europe : Japan had also known many comparable movements.

Contrary to what was said or believed by the workers in these work-ins, at least those we know about, they didn't seek to produce *in a different way* while remaining wage workers, rather they were primarily in search of a company : they became their own bosses while waiting for real ones.

« Outside these walls, we are no longer anything. »

Joe Toia, 49 years old, break-down mechanic at Chrysler, Detroit, explaining why the workers refused to strike against their company which was in difficulty.

These movements were born in reaction to industrial reorganisation. Sometimes it happened that workers made Capital pay for their downgrading, following the example of the metal-workers of Baden-Wurtemberg in 1978, where the owners committed themselves to guarantee equivalent employment, and their previous wages, to those employees affected by technological evolution. Obtained after a 16 day strike and 13 day lockout by 240,000 workers, the agreement concerned 40% of German metal workers. But such arrangements were the exception. For the moment industrial reorganisation was once again in limbo, and however much people understood the plan and the beginnings of its realisation through robotics, they were equally unclear about the pace of its introduction. The question was far from being a purely technological one : the extent and rapidity of robotization, and the forms taken by investments and innovation, depend on the relations between classes. Generally, it seems that Capital can no longer recycle those expelled from industry, as formerly it had recycled those expelled from the countryside.

Today we better understand that the fall in profitability arises from constraints on valorisation, which is threatened by the excessive fragmentation of work, and from constraints on Capital's reproduction of all the conditions of life, because that reproduction includes services which cannot be reduced to objects of consumption reproduced in series. In the collective services, productivity cannot be the same as that of industry. And if the State takes them over, it is to the detriment of the capitalist collectivity.

One solution would be to pass from the machine system to a system of automatic production, which has its own internal coherence (feedback, self-regulation, programming, and not just a simple execution of the orders given). The machines are to be brought under control, or in other words regulated, by one another, the objective being to achieve self-control. It is less a question of going beyond man than of making him more productive. He is to be better supervised but, in particular, things are to be organised so that even without monitoring work can only be done well, the mechanical constraint being sufficient.

This is certainly another aspect of the capitalist utopia. When « job enrichment » was supposed to remedy the « shattered work » (G Freidmann) of the unskilled,

people exaggerated the significance of the Volvo experiment, which produced mediocre economic and social effects. With or without the aid of electronics, proletarian self-exploitation will never be a massive phenomenon.

To date it does not seem that Capital has the capacity to release and put in place the enormous investments necessary for this restructuring. A general depreciation in the context of a social upheaval, the form of which we cannot envisage, would make it much easier. Devalorisation brought about by crisis is more than an economic fact, it also means the cards being re-dealt within the bourgeoisie, and political reorganisation, with new forms of power and new mediations between labour and Capital, something people have already experienced thanks to the double shocks of 1914-18 and 1939-45.

From the point of view of the workers what is at stake, as at the time of the introduction of the Scientific Management of work, is not simply employment and remuneration. It is also a question of the transformation of work itself, which capitalist evolution would like to see more regulated and better controlled by the enterprise. The choice is a social one : is it necessary to transfer a given work station to a country with cheaper labour ? But, then, what is to be done with the unemployed this creates in the advanced industrial countries ? Or, do you robotize the factory ? But then how do you respond to the workers demands ? In 1974, unskilled French car workers, recent immigrants, advanced traditional demands. In 1983 the unskilled painters at Renault, many of them second generation immigrants eager to remain in France, and working in a department threatened with automation, fought to obtain the status of skilled workers which would have guaranteed retraining after the modernization of the section. Existing on the basis of these material divisions, the trade unions hesitated to support these workers, but they could not ignore them either.

Born out of the previous fluctuations in growth, the « new social movements » thrived during the recession, which created difficulties in all areas : housing, transport, leisure etc. Some of the users themselves took charge of sectors which functioned too poorly. Among them a fringe became radicalised, notably through violence.

This radicalisation of a margin inscribed itself through what was the only genuine product of the crisis : the phenomenon of autonomy. As we have seen, no mass working class organisations were created after 1968, or after 1974. Although, with marvellous consistency, leftists continued to attempt to produce them ! Occasionally, workers organisations were created, and not just in France, but these never went beyond a local level. There was no longer a place for any kind of anarcho-syndicalism or IWW. Autonomy in the sense we use it here, represented the demonstration at Overney's funeral raised to the level of a social movement. That demonstration had concretised the deep resentment of active fractions of the population against social order, traditional politics and the existing institutions. Such resentment, which to some extent was widespread in the West, could take two opposing forms : that of the « alternative » movement, condemned, either through tail-ending the existing institutions or through creating new ones, to stimulate state reformism; or else that of terrorism, which swiftly merged into a neo-Leninism from which it returned to third-worldism, or maoist-populism. Against these two temptations, constantly threatening to yield to one or other of them, autonomy was the expression of the anti-political and anti-capitalist resentment felt by strata that

were more or less marginalized according to country.

It's no accident that autonomy proliferated to such an extent in Italy. Because of the particularities in the formation of the national unit, the Italian State was involved less actively, and in a less direct way, than in France, within a less centralised social and political life. Though a strong nationalised sector existed in Italy, its units became fiefdoms escaping from State control. The Italian economy confronted the crisis by relying on the initiative of privately owned companies and even of illegal contractors, in the iron and steel industry (Brescia region), as well as in textiles. Italian exports benefited from the super-exploitation of a proletariat employed in a semi-legal sector of small businesses. In 1979 it was estimated that 13,000 textile companies with an average workforce of five employees exported as much as the four largest French arms manufacturers.

Italian State strategy consisted of controlling nothing in detail in order to better keep overall control. After 1969 Italian society imploded, creating a vacuum in which initiative, escaping from central control by the established order, returned to a multitude of groups and tendencies. This occurred in all areas : the economy, the media (a proliferation of privately owned radio and TV stations) and in politics (conspiracies, terrorism, autonomy etc.). Autonomy made it's way within a society that was in the grip of a kind of civil cold war between these centrifugal tendencies, while the conservative forces of Capital employed themselves in playing off one against another. The conflict undermined social cohesion without – for the moment – changing anything essential. It was necessary to poorly understand the nature of the State to see the imminence of revolution in Italian society, as the Situationists did. But equally, it would be myopic to see only confusion.

It is true that the violence often only filled a vacuum and that following the example of May in France, words often replaced deeds. But « armed struggle » , whether suicidal or manipulated, was the autonomised aspect of a violence born in factories or cities, where proletarians responded to pressure from the bosses and state, and to control by the trade unions, with arson, sabotage and bombings. Increasingly isolated from the majority of workers, it was more and more driven to give an « example » to the masses in order to push them into struggle.

Where there is nothing except violence, it is a sign of failure. A proletarian movement can take on bosses or machines, whether selectively or in an insurrection. But in erecting violence into a system, and in pretending to make it the heart of a strategy, just as illusory as any other strategy outside of the social movement, terrorism substitutes itself for the latter. Violence limits itself to deepening the political crisis and transforms proletarians into spectators of a contest which no longer concerns them.

Italian autonomy was also a reaction by new working strata, neither factory workers or traditional employees, who were abandoned by the trade unions because they were too volatile to allow themselves to be organised by them.

This mixture generated a new form of anarchism, sometimes coupled with a revival of the communist lefts. The autonomes acted like anarchists by standing up to authority in their practise, not through any utopianism.

From its beginnings, Italian autonomy was a much larger phenomenon than French

leftism, and was the product of a more virulent working class violence, and of a far more widespread social rejection, than in France. Workers autonomy was an effect of the crisis, not its solution. Many proletarians no longer wanted the trade unions but they did not do the things which would have rid themselves of them. It was a refusal of politics which had neither the power or will to communise the world. For if that were undertaken, people would no longer speak of autonomy – necessarily people would act in an autonomous way in respect of all the existing institutions, but through making them useless, by destroying that which gives them a social function and base. « Autonomy » , as such, is the reality of a proletariat which secedes, or departs (temporarily) from the norm, but without any ability (and *by itself*) to overthrow it. To theorise this gap is to justify a lack, to make a shortcoming pass for its remedy.

After 1969, which saw the first united general strike with a social goal (over housing), it was working class action which obliged the trade unions to unite. The trade-union leaderships could not function as authoritarian structures. Even less than the parties, they could not form an apparatus that imposed itself on wage workers. The trade unions had to be permeable to workers autonomy and to feed on it. As for the numerous autonomous workers organisations which emerged over the last ten years, not just in Italy, they formed a different structure, based on a different rationality than trade union negotiations, but despite everything they remained immersed in the capitalist organisation of work. There is no obvious separation between demanding benefits in ones work and participating in the organisation of that work. One leads to the other. To demand the right to oversee working conditions and wages is to begin to organize work. In the same way workers « rights » (to meet, to communicate, to leaflet...) become trade union rights.

Thus, to the extent that they remain on the terrain of demands, these autonomous workers organisations, *as such*, cannot propose a revolutionary alternative. They become the focus of proletarian experience only on condition that they leave the terrain which gave them birth. Inevitably, however, the majority stuck to wishing to defend wage workers better than the official organisations. Consequently these were not potentially revolutionary structures, but equally, as they stood they were not assimilable by the existing institutions, because their anti-hierarchical nature and their rank and fileism was incompatible with social order, including that of the trade unions. But the institutions could digest some of the pieces.

After the shockwave of 1969-70, the trade unions attempted to renovate themselves through democratic structures and « union power » inside the enterprise. Their initiatives were given a battering in 1977, and the leader of the CGIL was forcibly expelled from a university where he held a rally. But autonomy, congealing in an immobilised situation, revived the councillist errors of 1969-70. This could only be the self-organisation of a fraction of society, standing apart from the rest, directly taking certain aspects of its life into its hands (squatting, the auto-reduction of excessive charges). However in taking themselves onto the social terrain, without any real connection between production and the space outside production, these struggles ran up against the same problems and reproduced the same contradictions found in traditional factory struggles. The energies expended dispersed themselves, and became lost in the space of an *economy* which was not called into question.

In the more advanced capitalist countries, there were fewer half-solutions. American, West German, Dutch and even Danish « parallel » movements brought into being a real organised marginality, palliating the deficiencies of normal Capital with a marginal capitalism. In these countries, unlike France or Italy, the crisis of the Scientific Management of work had not coincided with its final implementation. So the US and West Germany saw a marginal ghetto, while Italy, in the form of autonomy, gave birth to a movement that was confusedly radical.

Italian Autonomy was the most extreme wing of a leftism that was more social and less political than in France. (In the same way that the Italian Communist Party had for a long time been more « open » than the French Communist Party : ten years ago it was proclaiming what the left does today, stating in 1974 that it would accept austerity provided that it served the needs of structural reform). Italian leftism profited from an intellectual revival in the sixties, at a time when France by contrast was undergoing structuralism, and in its wake Althusser, etc.

After 1969, *Potere Operaio* wanted to bring organisation to a double movement (both workers and students) of unskilled workers, asserting a collective being and the need to take political power, not in order to manage or humanise production, but in order to change the whole of society. There was an understanding that the revolution was not primarily a working class problem, but this was still expressed within a sociological-classist perspective. So instead of the working class in the usual sense, they made out that most people were part of « the class ». This tendency towards a refusal of the ideology of work, even though it was expressed within a political perspective, was undoubtedly the furthest that leftism could go.

It was also an attempt to reunify proletarians through a return to the council (with the aid of Gramsci), and to the unity of the class. On the basis of the new reality of the worker as collective producer of surplus value (in fact analysed by Marx, but perceived as new), Tronti and Negri spoke of the mass-worker, of the collective worker, in other words of union through the labour-process, when on the contrary it was necessary to leave behind any pure and simple defence of the proletarian condition.

The proposal of a guaranteed wage for everybody, employed and unemployed workers, housewives, students and marginals sought to bring together the working strata : everyone in fact, apart from a minority of bourgeois and middle managers. These so-called « political » wages corresponded to the concrete need to suppress the wage control zones in Italy, and for uniform increases in wages. It was nothing less than a question of *creating* a proletariat through the universal generalisation of wages. The autonome platform chose a capitalist utopia for its theoretical horizon. Its egalitarianism, simultaneously a standardization of the proletarian condition, and a bringing together in common cause, represented a search for a kind of unification which could only be achieved in a revolution, and one with communist objectives.

In France, autonomy was especially composed of a fringe of out of work youths, which is certainly not in our view grounds for condemnation. The proletariat is also constituted on the basis of the unemployed, whether more or less voluntary, of temporary workers, of petty delinquents, of déclassé intellectuals. The strength and radicality of a proletarian movement will be identified amongst other things by the fact that it integrates those who are excluded from wage-labour, which will help it not to confine itself inside the limits of the workplace. But in France far more than

in Italy, the autonomy which asserted itself as such was centred on the violence of the marginal. The autonomes were understandably disgusted with politics, the left and leftism. They were right to refuse to play the game of democracy which is the best guarantor of civil peace. But they lapsed into a fetishism of violence and illegality. Neither of these things are absolute criteria of radicality, and neither can transform into a subversive act something which isn't. Where it corresponds to a massive surge against the existing institutions the practise of the breakaway demo is a critique in deeds of politics. But when it becomes systematized to the point of becoming an end in itself, it is as derisory and impotent as any other pointless demonstration. This could be seen in the anti-nuclear demo's such as that at Malville (1977). Against the majority of peaceful ecologists was juxtaposed a minority determined to fight, who merely added their violence to a demonstration which overall was reformist. Occupations of apartment blocks took on an important aspect of the capitalist organisation of life. But reduced to the establishment of ghettos they lapsed into marginality, despite the violence displayed by the occupants.

On March 23 1979, when the steelworkers of Lorraine who had been condemned to unemployment by restructuring, responded to a call from their trade unions and came to Paris to demonstrate, what happened in the streets summed up very well the situation over the last few years : the limits of the workers struggles, the impotent violence of the autonomes and the public non-existence of the revolutionary current. A great many of the steelworkers had come for a fight and had equipped themselves accordingly. They substituted a destructive exaltation for what they had not been able to do in their own industrial towns, that is to say, go beyond the proletarian condition. A working class radicality affirmed itself. This was not simply a defence of employment. The devastation of the commercial and financial centre of Paris and the seeking out of confrontation with the police expressed a hostility towards the entire system. There is a qualitative difference between rising up in your own town, « at home », and taking the dispute to the geographical heart of the nation's capital.

The trade unions were overwhelmed, but not called into question. They had retained control of the material organisation of the demonstration and busied themselves trying to limit the damage and the contact between the workers and the autonomes. The latter took an active part in the confrontation with the police and the destruction of property, but were incapable of any other link or practical activity with the workers except « fight ». No social project and no initial theoretical steps animated these clashes. The characteristics of the movement which appeared around 1968 persisted. It was essentially negative, gave itself no concrete objectives, and still did not understand, within and through its practise, that the destruction of capitalism involves positive measures of social transformation. It would have been useful if we had been present on March 23 1979, on our own terms. We certainly could not have abolished the limits of this unrest, even less given it a programme which it did not itself bear. That would be to lapse into leftism, in other words the management of other peoples struggles – which is what the ideologues of autonomy attempted in both France and Italy. The dissemination of our ideas during this day of rage would have had no immediate visible effects, but it is likely that it would have enabled us to establish some links and that it would have left some traces. Between 1968 and 1973 a revolutionary current had existed in France which was homogenous enough to mobilise itself when necessary, without being halted by the boundaries between groups. In 1977 a part of this

current derived from La Vieille Taupe and its environs had been able to regroup in order to intervene over the Baader affair. But in 1979 this current was too dislocated to intervene in a unified way. It kept silent or was extremely discreet.

Within a social movement the absence of a project is not to be deplored because it is necessary that every subversive gesture is accompanied by its own theoretical explanation, and that everyone is able to define communism. It is the situation of the proletariat which triggers its activity, and consciousness only appears as consciousness of the act, not in advance of it. Today, as ideology, autonomy is more or less dead. But the practices which the autonomes had wanted to organise remain, in a more diffuse way. The will to refuse the old world in every moment of life, in isolation from any social movement, inevitably lapses into one or other of the errors set out above – a margin more or less reduced to beggary, or terrorism, or a synthesis of the two : delinquency with a political justification. We don't pretend to criticize those who have in common with us a refusal of the old world, and a will to live this refusal today in practice *as far as possible*, for the manner in which they survive. But practices which ignore the social movement which produce them are condemned to blindly charge towards reforms or towards suicide. While it is true that politics and militantism feed on theory that has degraded into ideology, a pure and simple refusal of theory only results in becoming lost in the immediate, in other words in submitting to Capital which organises that immediate reality, or else in dying. « Without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement... »

The sudden appearance of autonomy was the fruit of a social crisis that is still insoluble, for Capital as well as for the proletariat. It confirmed the existence, in factories and elsewhere, of a small minority both resolute and ready to act. But act to what purpose ? Here the theoretical deficiency is serious. The autonomes suffered to an acute degree from a disease that is endemic within the revolutionary milieu : the irresistible urge towards activism. Durutti had also wanted to act without encumbering himself with chattering intellectuals. But in spite of the myths maintained about him by the anarchists, the Situationist International and even rock musicians, we should not lose sight of the essential point : his need to act placed him in the service of the republican state against a rival state form. While consciousness does not precede action, it is an indispensable moment of it.

At a different level the evolution of GLAT also testified to the crisis of revolutionary theory. In 1978 the group decided to continue its theoretical work, but ceased publishing its bulletin, which for several years had been one of the principal sources of intellectual nourishment for revolutionaries, just at the moment when this thought and the contribution of GLAT was most needed. GLAT said it could no longer see the relation between its work and the rest of the world. Denying the social function of revolutionary theory, it still intended to pursue its research even more than ever, but with the sole end of helping intellectuals go beyond themselves as intellectuals.

This extraordinary position was the counterpart of that held by Camatte who at the same moment was affirming the need for theoretical wandering, in the name of life. GLAT and Camatte thus showed their incomprehension of the relationship between theory and everything else. GLAT forgot that its bulletin, even without any perceptible response, nourished a theoretical maturation. By preferring life to ideas, Camatte proved that up to then he had granted the intellect a privilege which it cannot possess, except on penalty of mutilating the individual, and even his

intelligence : he had wanted to insert the whole of life into the theory. Once having seen the impossibility of this enterprise, instead of taking theory as what it is – an approximation, the most adequate possible form for a multiform reality, a perspective on the world which does not contain the world but is contained by it, an effort of comprehension which can never completely comprehend itself – Camatte threw overboard any claim to coherence.

Capital's triumph is not so much to export false ideas into the revolutionary movement but to make it lose the sense of its relation to society as a whole. Instead of developing the germs of the social movement which appeared in 1968-72, economic crisis only added new limitations to those of 1968, while producing a new generation of revolutionaries.

« The present crisis of Capital has not produced the revolutionary movement anew, paradoxically it has only deepened the crisis of modern revolutionary theory. » (L'Internationale Inconnue, *la Guerre Civile en Pologne*, 1976)

re-collecting our past (16)  
history and personal narrative of the last fifteen years

## The pirate Monde Diplomatique

The death of Baader and his comrades (1977) and the reactions which it provoked, notably in the press, gave two or three of us the idea of producing a fake *Monde Diplomatique*. The initiative brought together over a few days some energies which were momentarily isolated, and others who were then organised elsewhere. The main part of it was written and produced by the people who today produce *La Banquise*, with the assistance of members and friends of *la Guerre Sociale*, and some others. Part of the texts were reproduced in 1978 in Issue 2 of *la Guerre Sociale*.

It was a reaction to the spectacular reinforcement of the State in a period of crisis, which not only revealed its means of policing, but also gathered behind it nearly the whole of the media and of the political and intellectual forces. Far more than in the guise of the police state that was so much denounced, the counterrevolution appeared in the form of organised consensus. In West Germany, as elsewhere, the police operation functioned thanks to the conformism maintained by social inertia, and thanks to the guardians of the monopoly of speech : intellectuals, journalists, politicians, professors, experts, etc., who applied themselves to exacerbating and managing a popular hysteria which was undoubtedly without precedent in Europe since the last world war. The only discordant voices differed in calling for a « true » democracy, as if this hysterical consensus was not precisely a product of democracy.

Social inertia is made possible not by the « passivity » of the workers who continue no less to conduct struggles, but by respect for the limitations necessary for the normal functioning of capitalism and its democracy. It is obvious that an active communist movement would have found other forms of action, that were offensive in other ways, instead of, or in addition to, this *détournement* of the media. We by no means sought to turn its own weapons against the press. Confronting the journalistic servility which is plain to see in the media, we didn't call for a « true » journalism which was less respectful of power.

We had chosen *le Monde Diplomatique* both for reasons of convenience – its periodicity, and because the readership of this organ – left and liberal intellectuals, was precisely who we particularly wanted to attack. The technique of the forgery simultaneously made it possible for us to make our positions known (distribution through bookshops and by hand), and to attack the media through a process analogous to sabotage in the sphere of production.

Deprived of the means of effectively attacking the State, for example through a demonstration, or through any other more virulent act, we intervened in the domain of ideas, and within a limited milieu. The fake *Monde Diplomatique* did what the press is supposed to do in times of crisis, and which it evidently does not do : it exercised a critical spirit at a critical moment for power. To this end we employed irony and concealment : a powerful weapon, but a weapon of the weak who cannot conduct a frontal attack. We did what democracy did not do, but against it.

We produced 2000 copies. A few hundred were sent to journalists and personalities,

creating a certain shock in the enemy ranks. We know for certain that those in charge of the principle media it aimed at (*Le Monde*) were rather inconvenienced by it. The other copies were distributed very quickly in the anti-establishment milieu. Despite what was imagined by journalists, in good or bad faith, the achievement of such a fake, which cost us 4,500 francs in all, is within the reach of anyone who gives themselves the means. The strength of social inertia and the weight of received ideas are the real brakes on action that breaks out of the usual political framework, not the material difficulties.

Some readers or recipients took a while before realising that it was a hoax. Should we conclude from this that the texts were not clear enough ? Rather it proves the destructuring character of such an action, which shakes up the established frameworks of thought. And beyond that ? The entire issue contained nothing of a democratic protest, communism and the revolution were there. But the nature of such activity contains its own limitations.

The production had been carried out in a pleasant and efficient atmosphere, bringing into contact people who had been separated for a long time, or who did not know one another. The network of contacts which had been woven around *La Vieille Taupe* had been reactivated. We wondered what to do next. Meetings over following weeks led to nothing. It was a successfully conducted limited action, but that was all. We had confirmed that the work undertaken in and around *La Vieille Taupe* had left sufficient traces in people that they could on occasion form an effective force of action. But there was no question of organising this reserve of energies. Organisation is the organisation of tasks and no other task appeared sufficiently urgent to weld these energies together. However one of the key sentences of the fake was the last : Now, let us speak of something else.

re-collecting our past (17)  
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## La Vieille Taupe 2 and the Faurisson Affair

The texts in the pirate *Monde Diplomatique* displayed a flaw of which we only later saw the implications. Although it repeatedly asserted that the question was of little importance, and despite the fact that it centred its critique on the spectacular and democratic consensus, the fake *Monde Diplomatique* resolved the question of whether Baader *had been killed or had killed himself* : it appeared to it that there was no doubt that the truth was literally the reverse of what the media said, and that it was extremely likely the prisoners of Stammheim had been killed by others than themselves.

The paradox of a forgery aiming at a truth ! It was a mistake to dwell on « literal » truth. Just as the « truth » of our *Monde Diplomatique* was not its title, even though this was written in black on white, in the same way the truth of the death of Baader was not the identity of the finger which pulled the trigger on the gun. It is literally true that this finger certainly had to possess one identity rather than another. In the same way, it is surely true that the gas chambers had to exist – or not. But for a revolutionary, the identity of the finger that killed Baader, just like the existence or non-existence of the gas chambers, is no more than a truth devoid of meaning, about as useful as the proverbial knife without a blade for which the handle is missing. Yet it was the problem of this truth which tore a little further apart a French revolutionary current which was already well dispersed.

1979 : to my right, a « little professor » from Lyon who for some years had been proclaiming the following « good news for humanity » : the gas chambers in the Nazi concentration camps never existed, they were no more than sinister prisoners gossip, taken up as war propaganda and appointed as official truth by those forces – in particular Zionism and Stalinism – whose interests converged on this point. It was the same for the genocide of Jews, which « in the strict sense » had no reality. On the first point the crackpot developed an argument that was sometimes convincing, at least at first sight. He showed how fragile some « proofs » of official history really are.

To my left, the representatives of the corporation of historians who, after having for a long time opposed the deepest silence to the little professor, declared in *Le Monde* : « it is not necessary to ask how such a mass murder was possible *technically*. It was technically possible because it took place (...) there is not, there cannot be a debate over the question of the gas chambers ». Then, having put forward these ethical premises, the corporation more or less entered the debate and applied themselves to showing, sometimes in a convincing way, that the little professor was not as rigorous as he claimed and on occasion was even a forger.

Neither adversary spared themselves any considerations as to the motivations of their enemy, whether they located these in psychopathology or in the petty minded need to defend a nice little earner, not to speak of the shadowy ulterior political motives which both camps readily lent themselves to.

All this took place in the middle of an antifascist clamour from all those who had the floor and intended to hang on to it : politicians of every tendency merged

together – from democrats in good standing to ex-Vichyists and ex-OAS, passing from Stalinists and journalists in search of a scoop through to the guardians of memory, without forgetting those people who consider it important to communicate their opinion on every digestive disorder of Western good conscience : the intellectuals.

The Faurisson affair occurred in France after two others which, at first sight, it greatly resembled. First of all there had been a particularly unsavoury journalistic « coup » : someone had gone to gather the senile ramblings of a former Vichy Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, Darquier de Pellepoix, now retired to Spain. Then, with a great fanfare, the European media had launched onto television screens a series produced in the United States devoted to the tragic destiny of a Jewish family during the Second World War. It was not the first time that the alarming spectre had been brought out : was Nazism raising its head again ? But thanks to the crisis, this question had more troubling resonances : around it could concentrate the irrational fears which haunt men when they identify their own futures with the extremely uncertain future of a world which oppresses them. We thus had the uncommon sight of the highest government authorities discussing the urgent necessity of purchasing a television « series ». The first screening of *Holocaust* was a moment of great national harmony. To listen to some everyday conversations, the duty of any democrat that evening was to be in front of his TV.

The attention of newspaper readers was drawn to Faurisson for the first time, courtesy of *Le Matin*, which undoubtedly wished to mount an operation of the same kind which *L'Express* had successfully conducted with Darquier de Pellepoix. Knowing the circumstances in which an interview was extracted from the little professor and the way they then doctored and presented the interview in question, we might have been shocked if we had been interested in that sort of thing (codes of ethics), and if we still had any illusions about the profession of journalist.

The socialist newspaper announced that in Lyon, a teacher was supporting Darquier de Pellepoix. Moreover, Jean-Pierre Pierre-Bloch, a frenzied antiracist, had told *Le Matin* that Darquier's « theory » was the same as that of the « falsifier Rassinier ». What's more Faurisson also claimed to follow Rassinier. Rassinier being dead – and what *Le Matin* had not thought to publish – Faurisson having declared that Darquier was the very kind of man he had fought all his life, the little professor of Lyon found himself alone against all. On one side the bad guy, on the other side the good guys. Everything was thus in place for one of those affairs which can only leave indifferent those who know what the society of the spectacle is. We were about to witness one of those events created from nothing in order to give breadth to the background noise, so that not for an instant is there any break in the incidental music which is the *raison d'être* of the media, the flow of pseudo-information which prevents the proletariat from thinking.

However, a number of people, who nearly all had in common that they were in favour of the abolition of wage labour (among them Pierre Guillaume, Jean-Pierre Carasso, Hervé Denès and Christine Martineau) thought it would be helpful to write to *Libération* in order to affirm that Rassinier, who Bloch had made a spiritual ancestor of Darquier, far from having been a Nazi had been a left-wing extremist, a member of the Resistance deported to Buchenwald, and that he was still a socialist and a pacifist when he formulated the theories which now earned him a comparison with a Vichy Commissioner for Jewish Affairs.

What were revolutionaries doing in this mess ? Some of those who today write *La Banquise* appended their signatures to this letter which appeared under the title « Do You Know Rassinier ? ». Today we consider that adding those signatures was a fundamental error, for several reasons, the principal one being that this letter aimed, above all, to prepare « the debate ».

Indeed, what was the debate about ? The official version and current public opinion affirm that the Nazis deliberately massacred Jews. « Revisionists » of the Faurisson type retort that the deportees died of hunger and disease, etc. Instead of dipping a toe into this debate as we did, and instead of losing themselves in it as some other revolutionaries did, we would all have been better advised to respond :

« This debate is false. We will no more become specialists in Zyklon B than in 1977 we claimed to have conducted the autopsy on Baader. A very large number (which we will let you determine) of Jews, and Baader and his comrades, were killed by the German State and the world capitalist system. »

From the start, the interest of revolutionaries in the concentration camps (and thus in Rassinier) formed part of an attempt to critically analyse the war of 1939-45. [Note<sup>1</sup>] Understanding how Nazi atrocities had been used, and even exaggerated, in order to justify the war and its aftermath, helped us to better understand the false opposition between democracy and fascism. It was for this reason that we had republished an article from *Programme Communiste* : « Auschwitz ou le grand alibi », in 1971 and 1974. Today in 1983 after a four year campaign by the second *Vieille Taupe*, which had been created for this purpose by Pierre Guillaume, those who once read the works published by the bookshop *la Vieille Taupe*, which had closed in 1972, are still unaware of what *Vieille Taupe 2* thinks about 1939-45, or about fascism. For four years, the only question for *Vieille Taupe 2* has been gassings and the right to speak about them.

As we have said, those who met at the bookshop *la Vieille Taupe* considered that their actions and their writings were their signature; *la Vieille Taupe* was a link and a meeting place – everything except a signature. Pierre Guillaume revived it in the exclusive form of a signature which, whether he wanted it or not, drew all its interest from a past activity which had nothing to do with its present activities. In saying this, we are not putting ourselves forward as the supercilious heirs of an activity of which he had been the principal organiser. Quite simply, out of fidelity with what we once had in common with him, it is necessary for us to oppose the Pierre Guillaume of today to that of former times.

While Rassinier's *The Lie of Ulysses* is an interesting document, and while it stands out from the majority of writings on concentration camps, and from the excesses displayed by some of them, this doesn't make it an exceptional work. Everything that some have wished to see in it could have been brought out from other

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Note<sup>1</sup> However it is incorrect to write, as Pierre Guillaume has : « Briefly, since 1970, *Vieille Taupe* has shared the essential theories of Paul Rassinier. » (text sent to *Libération* quoted in Serge Thion, *Historical Truth or Political Truth*, *la Vieille Taupe*, 1980, p. 139). Or that « *The Lie of Ulysses* was unanimously accepted by *Vieille Taupe* which recognised its radical importance at all levels. » (Pierre Guillaume, preface to Rassinier, *Ulysses betrayed by his own*, *la VT*, 1980). The second assertion is very exaggerated. As for the first, Rassinier's « theories » were very little known, and still recently few of those who defended him had read anything other than *The Lie of Ulysses* and *The Drama of the European Jews*. Even today who has read «*The Persons Responsible for the Second World War* » ?

accounts, for example that of the Russian deportee Martchenko, (*My Testimony*, La Seuil, 1970). Far more than the book itself, it is the reactions it provoked which are revealing.

Rassinier's interest lies above all in his refusal of war propaganda. When he leaves behind his hostility to brainwashing and begins to explain the war and the Jewish question, he is entirely off his head : not through errors of fact (we haven't attempted to check his sources), but above all through his angle of approach to these problems. The fact that his work might disturb people changes nothing. The Moonies also disturb people and unite a large *Union Sacrée* in opposition to them. Does this make them interesting ?

To deal with the massacre of Jews during the war by devoting a hundred pages to statistical calculations (one third of *The Drama of the European Jews*, 1964) in order to determine whether 1,600,000 or 6,000,000 Jews died, is to peer at things through the wrong end of the spyglass, and continues the Nuremberg Trials through contesting them. A new and profound book on this subject would be documented, but it would leave to one side the false problem of quantification. Everything has been said when it has been shown how the figure of six million, at the very least doubtful, has developed into dogma. One says nothing when one elaborates rival statistics for oneself, just as unverifiable for non-specialist readers as those one criticises.

Most of the documents and files which we have consulted were supplied to us by Vieille Taupe 2. They show that Rassinier was inclined towards, and supported throughout, by a pacifist, socialist (SFIO) and humanist current, in the line of those state employed teachers of the III<sup>rd</sup> Republic such as Dommangeat, who were freethinkers and opponents of war. When war came, in 1914, as in 1939, they generally accepted, if not justified, it. But outside periods of war they maintained the anti-militarist tradition and sometimes declared themselves to be libertarians. After the scandal over *The Lie of Ulysses* around 1950-51, this current, which had received Rassinier's critique of brainwashing favourably, faded away. Rassinier then buried himself in the Jewish question and the gas chambers and disengaged from the left of the SFIO, which was engaged in other struggles (against the war in Algeria). He now rubbed shoulders more comfortably with the extreme right than with the former pacifists and socialists, who in general gave into the cold war. For la Vieille Taupe 2, « Rassinier unshakeably remained until his death a socialist, pacifist, antiracist, internationalist (...) » (Pierre Guillaume, forward to *Ulysses betrayed by his own*, p. 179). Rassinier was a socialist, in the sense that he remained for twenty years in the SFIO and even represented it in the Chamber of Deputies. His pacifism excluded internationalism, which among other things presupposes breaking with the « workers parties », and this explains why he agreed to travel alongside the extreme right.

Considering that « warmongering had passed from the right to the left », that « *Resistancialism* was being maintained there » (rough draft of a letter to Bauchet, 1964), and entirely preoccupied by peace, he first and foremost reserved his blows for the left. For him, as for antifascism, there existed a favoured enemy, but for him this was the left, and in particular the Communist Party, not fascism. He judged the right to be less dangerous – and this shocks left intellectuals – in much the same way that around 1950 Sartre preferred the USSR to the USA. He did not share the ideas of Bardèche, the editor of *Défense de l'Occident* [*Défense de l'Occident*

(*Defence of the West*) and *Rivarol* were right-wing journals - translator], but all the same Bardèche was a « good man (...) more a poet than an editor » (letter of Rassinier to Faurisson, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1967); he found *Défense de l'Occident* or *Rivarol* less harmful than *l'Humanité* [the Communist Party newspaper - translator]. Rassinier did not merely become a « revolutionary without revolution » writing wherever he could make his « scientific » studies known. From the start of his post-war activity Rassinier followed a precise political line : « Peace above all » – which was in no way revolutionary. He ended up by placing his pacifism at the service of the Western camp in the Cold War, and more particularly, of the extreme-right.

In the issue of *Rivarol* for 1<sup>st</sup> January 1964 Rassinier set out his viewpoint as follows : obsessed by the desire to justify the reparations that Germany paid to the State of Israel, the international Zionist movement « brought the reinforcement of the gas chambers and the six million dead » to all of Khrushchev's attacks on Europe. In so doing, the Zionist movement will not fail to bring about that « not only the horses of Cossacks come to water themselves in the waters of the Rhine, but that their tanks are filled up on their way to the Sahara and that their planes stopover on their way to drop their bombs on the United States. »

The supposedly anti-racist Rassinier, who understandably found the Stalinist discourse of *l'Humanité* disgusting, was not embarrassed in 1963-4 to write in a rag like *Rivarol* in which columns of the most indecent racism were spread out at length.

By forcibly incorporating the Sudeten Germans in 1918 into Czechoslovakia « whose culture and civilization were several centuries behind them, the Allies insulted them : a little like that insult which is offered today to those white Rhodesians who, under the cover of democracy and anti-racism, the universal conscience would like to place under the domination of negroes ». Rassinier, *The Persons Responsible for the Second World War*.

If it means to make Rassinier better known *Vieille Taupe 2* should republish *The Persons Responsible for the Second World War*. In this book the Second World War becomes the work of a conspiracy of arms dealers, dominated by the Freemasons and Jews, supposedly influential even in the SFIO. It would be necessary to cite thirty long quotes in order to give the full extent of the abjectly anti-Semitic character of this work. The Allies blame everything on Hitler. Rassinier begins by sharing out the responsibility before making it weigh especially heavily on the Allies. From our point of view it is just as absurd to say that Hitler wanted war (the point of view of the Nuremberg trials) as that he didn't want war (the point of view of Rassinier). For revolutionary theory, the outbreak of a modern war has little to do with the will, good or bad, of statesmen.

« The Jews » enable Rassinier to turn to his own account a well known view of the world : that old tradition, entirely foreign to revolutionary critique, which explains world politics through the schemes of an international network of financiers and arms dealers which pulls all the strings. Rassinier joined those who identified this network with the trans-national Jewish « community », opposing « international capitalism » to national industry and labour.

Admittedly, one can separate an authors opinions from his work, but when it is a question of anti-Semitic indulgence or prejudice in the work of someone who

studies the Jewish question and the concentration camps, which rather a lot of Jews entered, one may fear that the author is no more objective than advocates of the official version of history.

Why does *Vieille Taupe 2* present a distorted image of Rassinier ? Why do his ideas need to be accompanied by the image of an anti-racist man of the left ? The original *Vieille Taupe* had indicated the fundamental aspects of Bordiga without denying his Leninism, or hiding the fact that he had always approved of the repression at Kronstadt, for example. We did not need to *tidy up* his biography. The strength of the communist ideas he held was enough to separate the valid positions from the erroneous opinions in his work. If *Vieille Taupe 2* dresses Rassinier up in the mask of an anti-racist and internationalist, this is because all of its activity has as its objective to *influence the media*. Its goal is that Rassinier and Faurisson are acknowledged and accepted in the forum of ideas. It is therefore necessary to make Rassinier presentable; so his biography will be given a face-lift. This is an enormous regression compared to what the Situationist International or the original *Vieille Taupe* had said : when they spoke of subversive elements in certain « unused books », they gave them a universal range by setting them within a critical theory. There is nothing like this in the activity of *Vieille Taupe 2*, which merely publishes Rassinier and Faurisson. It thus becomes necessary for it to exaggerate the subversive, and even the merely acceptable, where there is none.

At the end of 1978 when the Faurisson affair erupted, the question of the concentration camps had been discussed amongst us for several years.

In 1977 a draft text had been given to *la Guerre Sociale* by Gilles Dauvé. Modified with the direct or indirect collaboration of quite a lot of people, and thus of Pierre Guillaume, it appeared in 1979 in the third issue of *la Guerre Sociale*. The way in which we had intended to speak of Faurisson became instead the desire to do something for him : he had been attacked because of his heretical ideas on the Nazi camps and after having been denounced by *Libération*; as for Faurisson himself, he set his misadventures within a much larger context, against all official propaganda, by stating that the campaign against Baader had disgusted him. Serge Quadruppani addressed a letter (unpublished) to *Libération*. Pierre Guillaume wrote the letter which *Libération* published on January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1979, which we spoke of above. (quoted in Thion, *Historical Truth and Political Truth*, pp 128-130). This letter, written to protest against the assimilation of Rassinier with Darquier de Pellepoix, gave just as false a picture of Rassinier as the one it claimed to criticise.

Without even talking about its very questionable content, it was a serious mistake to enter, even slightly, what was and always would be a journalistic and political scandal, *and nothing more*. We did not have to enter the arena of public opinion. Expressing the interests of a movement in its entirety, in the form of a manifesto for example, is neither to remain in an ivory tower, nor to project oneself into a cause while forgetting everything else. But the signatures added to this letter only encouraged some of the more clear sighted, those for example who identified with the *Guerre Sociale* article on the camps, to look at things from an angle of attack which no longer had anything to do with revolutionary theory, and either *to become more interested in what interested Faurisson*, like Pierre Guillaume, or to poorly distinguish between their ideas and those of Faurisson, like the « infantrymen » of *la Guerre Sociale*.

Meeting Faurisson should have opened our eyes to the difference in nature between his research and our activity. During 1979, dealing with Pierre Guillaume, we argued with him and we criticised him, but without ourselves understanding the roots of the affair, and thus without trying to make him understand : that revolutionaries cannot support Faurisson. That's not to say that we could have prevented him from reviving *Vieille Taupe* for such a waste of energy. But in any event our responsibility is great, because we were among those who knew Pierre best.

The idea that : « We who are revolutionaries in any case intend to support him (...) because Faurisson is being attacked for having sought for and spread the truth », presented in the *Guerre Sociale* leaflet *Who is the Jew ?*, was false when the leaflet was distributed (1979). At that time we neither understood this clearly, nor stated it clearly (the leaflet is quoted in *Mise au Point*, pp 98-99)

Firstly, we don't have to support Faurisson because we have no more in common with him than with those who persecute him. The problem with Faurisson is obvious : society distinguishes between murder and involuntary death. It pursues the assassin and resigns itself to workplace and traffic accidents, the « natural » consequences of a way of life. But from the point of view of the human species, the important thing is to avoid massacres and suffering, whether it is a matter of murder or of the kind of violent death that is considered normal. The death of a child strangled by a « sadist » excites the imagination more than the death of thousands of others from hunger. The prosecutors at Nuremberg reduced the deaths in the concentration camps to the first example : they made them a crime. The lawyers for the accused at Nuremberg reduced them to the second example : they made them an accident. To try to prove that the Nazis killed *without wanting to or without wanting to systematically*, is to adopt the point of view of the defence lawyers at Nuremberg.

Analysing the 1939-45 war is not what interests Faurisson. His « passion for the truth » takes the gas chambers as its object. That's up to him. But this self-limitation leads to the same result as the antifascist campaign which presents the Nazis as monsters with sole responsibility for the war. For Faurisson explores a minor point, and trains the spotlight on this point, just like the other experts, thus obscuring *what surrounds* this point and might explain it. By helping to focus attention on the gas chambers, he dramatises them even more and reinforces the myth. A great obscurity continues to reign over the whole question of Nazism and 1939-45, which this focus helps to sustain. It is only by leaving aside the gas chambers that one might consider them seriously and hold the only discourse that is possible on this question :

« Faurisson is attacked and persecuted for having affirmed that the gas chambers are no more than a tall tale by prisoners. We are not experts and we don't want to become experts, therefore we won't enter into this discussion. But those who believe that by removing the gas chambers from Nazism, one might weaken the horror which it inspires, only reveal their grand-guignolesque view of what it is that makes human life truly horrible. They attach the horror to images instead of seeing it where it actually is : in the relations between men. In their conception, the fact that a crude tall story was imposed on millions of poor wretches would be less serious than the existence of a particular technique for extermination. Yet, if the gas chambers were nothing more than a sinister rumour among prisoners, it would

be necessary to admit that in order for such an enormous tall story to be imposed with such force on so many people, these people must have been thrown into a radical dispossession of themselves. However, the fact that this dispossession indeed exists is a massive fact which no-one thinks of discussing.

« Whether or not the Nazi gas chambers had a concrete existence matters very little to us. They exist today, as at the very least they existed to the deportees, that is to say as an image derived from a horrible reality. It is not necessary to have anti-Semitic ulterior motives in order to discuss the possibility that this image did not correspond, or corresponded only partially, to reality. Our task is to subject to critique the part which this image plays in anti-fascist ideology, and critique that ideology itself. In doing this, when this discussion and these critiques will lead to us being characterised as Nazi's, we will have verified the totalitarian mentality of those who wish us ill. But what qualifies us in our own eyes to undertake this task of deconstructing an ideology, is precisely that we are not dispassionate fanatics for truth – assuming such a type really exists. We believe it's possible to speak because we recognise that the gas chambers have a basic level of existence : in the eyes of millions of deportees they embody the real horror of what they experienced. « The gas chambers, if they were not the means, would at least be the metaphor » (Y. Chotard). This appalling image which has come down to us hardly gives us any information about the real functioning of the camps. But it tells us very well the feelings which they inspired in men. »

That is all there is to say on the question of the gas chambers. As for the question of the camps, it is the analysis of 1939-45 which allows us to situate and understand them. It is certainly not the camps which enable us to understand Nazism. Just as in the same way it isn't the « Gulag » which explains the USSR, but the understanding of the history and nature of the USSR which explains the Gulag.

The massacre of the Jews made it possible for democracy to save the costs of a critique of Nazism. Apart from the work of specialists there is no real attempt at understanding Nazism as a whole. The standard image of Nazism held by most people concentrates on the worst horrors, both real and imagined. This impression is formed according to a process which is simultaneously spontaneous and organised, popular and state-controlled. The article « The Horror is Human » in the first issue of *La Banquise* analyses the process of projecting the horror of the present onto the past.

Faurisson affirms that he is driven by a passion for the truth. But the truth is only true through a social relation, as when one speaks of a « true » behaviour, of an attitude that is appropriate to a situation, or of a reaction which moves things forward. Truth never lies in the raw fact, or in an inert thing or an isolated thought, it emerges from the process of setting into relation (*mise en rapport*). It is constructed by the gaze which falls upon it (see « Truth and Public Opinion » in this issue). The truth about the camps undoubtedly includes the intentions of those who ordered their construction, but it lies especially in the conditions which produced them and in their operation. The truth of the camps is not the dimensions of the buildings, the cost of the materials, the number of deportees, the proportion of Poles, etc., or more exactly these figures are only data which do not form the truth : they become it through what is bound to be an *organisation* of the facts. The controversy over the number of Jewish victims of Nazism distances us from the truth of the camps.

Whether Faurisson wants it or not, he also organises the facts according to his point of view. However, this point of view makes him absolutely indefensible.

Faurisson searches for *the authentic*. An authentic document doesn't necessarily (and doesn't often) speak the truth, we only know whether or not it comes from the source from which it (or that one) says that it comes. Authenticity means to remain faithful to one's own code. An authentic being only exists in relation to norms, or to a restrictive code. Truth, a social relation, is potentially universal, and falls within the range of human activity. In this way the « truth is revolutionary ». The truth does not lie in the work of Faurisson.

« (...) the number of Jews exterminated by the Nazis (or victims of « genocide ») is happily equal to zero » Faurisson quoted in Thion.

Faurisson's detractors treat him as Nazi or a madman. But quite simply, he plays with words. This denial of genocide only makes sense if one gives the word the significance which the most narrow-minded antifascism gives it. In this sense to say that the Nazis perpetrated genocide against the Jews would mean that for a long time they had wanted and planned the deaths of millions of Jews and that they then organised this by exceptional methods. This is the meaning which one finds in the Robert, a dictionary published after the Nuremberg trials : « Methodical destruction of an ethnic group ». Faurisson speaks the same false language as the « exterminationists ». He also makes massacre a question of *intentions*. He is on their terrain, and not on that of a revolutionary historical, or even of a merely serious, critique. Even liberal historians can see that the truth of the camps and the genocide does not lie in a history of intentions.

There was a massacre of a large number of Jews because they were Jews. And in our eyes, if words have meaning, there was genocide, whatever the exact number of deaths. In the same way France committed a massacre at Setif and in Constantinois in 1945 which killed between 4500 and 45000 Algerians. And there was a genocide of Red Indians.

We do not wish to discuss with people who deny massacres and racial persecution by twisting words, but rather with those who try to explain them, something which neither the revisionists nor the exterminationists do. Faurisson is neither usable nor supportable because he reinforces a confusion which revolutionary theory is precisely there to dispel.

In a text published by *Libération* on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1979, Pierre Guillaume wrote two sentences which could have summarised very well our position on the content of this affair : « The anti-Nazism without Nazi's which reigns over the world is an outlet for a confused society which cannot manage to face its own problems. One doesn't fight against the inexorable mechanisms of real oppression with stereotypical representations (*images d'Épinal*) ». If this text had contained only this, we would simply have observed that its publication in *Libération* went against our principles : that is to say we don't defend our basic positions in the newspapers. Unfortunately it contained something else. Shortly after the publication of this article Pierre Guillaume explained why he had considered it useful to send his prose to the central organ of neo-reformism.

After having explained the persecutions which had befallen Faurisson, Pierre Guillaume continued : « it became vital for the development of the situation to obtain support and thus to obtain the agreement of everyone over the same text, without concession or second thoughts. This text therefore had to include the famous sentence which seemed to render Faurisson indefensible : « Hitler never ordered the execution of a single Jew merely because he was Jewish » by showing that this sentence was strictly true, even if Hitler did not give a damn about what became of the Jews in practise »

This sentence *indeed* rendered Faurisson indefensible.

As to whether it's really true that on « the level of strictly scientific history » « Hitler never ordered the execution of a single Jew merely because he was Jewish », having examined Faurisson's scientific work more closely, we are no longer so sure. But even if it were true, this truth appears so severe, so restricted, that it is reduced to nothing. When Pierre Guillaume adds : « even if Hitler didn't give a damn about what happened to the Jews », he himself shows the inanity of this alleged truth.

A member of Herouth might say : « Begin never ordered or accepted that anyone was killed at Sabra and Chatila because of his Palestinian sympathies. » Faurisson would agree : where are the *authentic* documents proving the contrary ? The *truth* is that one is always responsible for one's allies, and that even if it did not want it, the Israeli army at least created the conditions favourable to this massacre (even without speaking of the fact that it allowed the murderers to continue). The Israeli board of inquiry itself recognised that the State had an « indirect » responsibility. One could multiply sentences of this kind : Guy Mollet [Socialist Prime Minister at the time of the struggle for independence in Algeria - translator] never ordered or accepted that anyone was killed or tortured merely because it was suspected that he belonged to the FLN. Stalin never ordered. . .

It is strictly false to assert that Hitler didn't give a damn about [ie. was indifferent to - translator] the fate of the Jews. He wasn't organising their collective massacre from 1919 onwards, but he did plenty in order that rather a lot of them died, and it is not really to be the victim of antifascist propaganda to think that he did not mourn their fate. Is it necessary to find *written orders* by Guy Mollet himself in order to associate him with the Algerian torture ? Undoubtedly he did not give a damn what happened to the militants of the FLN who fell into the hands of the paratroopers during the battle of Algiers. In order to be anti-Stalinist is it necessary to find orders written by Stalin proving that he was directly implicated in the politics of his State ? In reality, revolutionary critique doesn't need the individual culpability of heads of State, and it is the same for their innocence. What determines our attitude towards them is not their good or bad will. What makes them enemies is the fact that they are heads of State. But Vieille Taupe 2 would seek to demonstrate that the Nazis, and particularly Hitler, were not « guilty » of everything attributed to them. To assert the opposite of the official version of something is not the same as to criticise it.

How does Faurisson claim to defend the indefensible ? Here are the explanations which he gives in Thion's book :

« Hitler never ordered nor admitted that anyone was to be killed because of

his race or his religion »

« Explanation of this sentence : »

« Hitler and the Nazis said: "the Allies and the Jews want our annihilation, but it is they who will be annihilated." »

« Similarly, the Allies and the Jews said: "Hitler and the Nazis want our annihilation, but it is they who will be annihilated." »

« For one side as for the other, what mattered first was to *win the war*, at the same time against the military and against the civilians (men, women, the old, children all together). »

It is here that we disengaged from him. *Hic Jacet Lepus*. [Here is the crux of the problem].

Hitler and the Nazis on one side, the Allies and the Jews on the other : delimiting the sides involved in this way is historically false and it ought to be odious to anyone who isn't anti-Semitic; The Nazis – a political party in power within a State – and Hitler – the head of that party and of that State – form an easily defined whole. But, unless one thinks, like the pre-war anti-Semites, that the Jews manipulated the democratic regimes, it is false to present the Jews as a belligerent entity. Faurisson clarifies in a footnote : « On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1939, Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Jewish Congress, declared war on Germany. » Apart from the fact that on the historical level this is a fiction, we would point out that Weizmann was not at all, like Hitler or Roosevelt, a Head of State capable of mobilising armies and citizens. Faurisson continues : « For Hitler, the Jews were representatives of a hostile, belligerent nation. » It must be noted that on this point Faurisson shares Hitler's point of view.

In its special issue devoted to the Jews on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 1939, *Je Suis Partout*, the organ of French fascists and anti-Semites, wrote :

« The Jews – we believe we have demonstrated it sufficiently – constitute despite their dispersion a perfectly homogenous nation, more coherent from the racial point of view than all other human groupings. For this reason they are subject to the great laws which govern the relations between the different human communities of the world. However the life of a nation is made up of the alternatives between peace and war. (...) »

« The French people are at peace with Germany. The Jewish people are at war with Germany. »

« It does not matter who started it. Let's note that the Jewish nation has a PERSONAL disagreement to settle with the Reich and that it endeavours to settle it victoriously by mobilising under its standards the greatest possible number of allies. »

Making racial criteria the sign of membership of a nation which one is fighting, is a racist politics. To consider that this nation defined by racist politics really exists, is to adopt a racist point of view. Reducing the deaths of Jews during the Second

World War to a banal act of war, is to conceal racism as a fundamental component of Nazi ideology and politics.

Certainly, « one doesn't fight against the inexorable mechanisms of real oppression with stereotypical representations ». But what are Faurisson and Vieille Taupe 2 doing ? To the dominant stereotypical image, outlined at Nuremberg and coloured by the projection of modern horror, *they oppose another stereotypical image* : that of a war between the Jews and the Nazis. This conception, which they share with the anti-Semitic right, is no more false than that which turns an imperialist war into a crusade against Absolute Evil. But it is no less false. Those who see in the birth of the « myth » of genocide the work of a Jewish conspiracy think according to the same pattern as those who see behind Faurisson's work the hand of a neo-Nazi international. Both of them have a policeman's conception of history.

Pierre Guillaume's *intentions* are of little importance. It must be noted that far from making it possible for our basic positions to be expressed by drawing on the work of Faurisson, his activity only resulted in giving ultra-left support to this Lyonnais crackpot.

At the beginning of 1980, having decided to put things in writing, J-P Carasso, G Dauvé, C Martineau and S Quadrupani each wrote to Pierre Guillaume expressing their profound disagreement with him. A belated attempt to straighten things up regarding Vieille Taupe 2, but at least, we dipped a toe into it.

Faurisson, we wrote, only violated a taboo without taking it apart, and he remained on the terrain of myth. One doesn't refute religion, and one doesn't seek to « convince » its followers, rather one shows its function and its operation. In the same way one would not refute an advertisement, something which is neither true nor false : its intention is not to demonstrate, but to associate, in the same way that a myth does, and is both elaborate and vivid in its variants. Thus it is absurd, if one wishes to deconstruct, to seek to prove that *the myth lies*.

« Working-class people (...) are drawing upon beliefs which, though rarely considered, are still in most cases firmly there. These beliefs, some of the basic Christian doctrines, they hold but do not examine. Nor do they often think that they have much relevance to the day-to-day business of living » (Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin, 1958, pp. 115-16). This truth obviously applies to all classes. The same person who shows immense common sense in his own life, will everyday swallow without discussion the worst improbabilities about Jesus, or Stalin, or the gas chambers, etc.

Pierre Guillaume's response, a few months later, can be summarised as : I'm sticking to my guns. Since then he has always pursued this course.

Roughly speaking, everyone more or less believes in the gas chambers. But doubt about them is not some miraculous lever that might enable one to raise the world or its ideology. It may be that doubt about them is growing. So what ? To believe that one could intervene in order that the abandoning of this belief was not achieved smoothly, and that this might force people to reflect on the mechanisms of ideology, is a delusion close to delirium. Why would the gas chambers form the providential grain of sand, capable of jamming the mechanism of antifascist ideology ? There is no such grain of sand. To be convinced of this it is only

necessary to see to what extent the Faurisson affair was specifically *French*.

The principal function of horrific mythology is to blind people to the fundamental unity of the modern world. Concentrationist mythology derived from the Second World War is only part of this set of representations of barbarism, against which the only recourse is supposedly democracy. But concentrationist mythology and the imagery of the gas chambers are by no means the cornerstone of the dominant ideology. They play a role of unequal importance according to country. In the United States, an Arthur Butz, both « revisionist » and anti-Semitic, can teach in a small university, without his theories sparking off the journalistic and political hysteria of a « Faurisson affair ». In Britain, a former officer in the special services could organise a fake concentration camp in which people could pay to be treated badly, whereas in France such an enterprise would have been impossible, there would have been a mobilisation of organisations and the intervention of the law.

As Pierre Guillaume had showed in his post-face to Kautsky's *Three Sources of Marxism* (Spartacus, 1969), there is no consciousness outside of a practise within which this consciousness has a function. The Leninist ambition to « make (people) become conscious » is ideological : it is only used to give the donor of consciousness power over those to whom he brings it. It wouldn't occur to us to appeal for communism through a leaflet. Even during a revolutionary period one would not « appeal », one would express what one was doing. Public opinion is the opposite of this : it develops a passionate interest in what it does not do, in what it cannot change.

When the revolutionary horizon appears to be blocked, revolutionaries readily cling to miraculous solutions. Vieille Taupe 2 believes in a certain number of « principles» that are supposed to be subversive : truth, honesty, scientific probity, the accuracy of information. It fights in the name of the *ideal* of the media as against their *real use*. It appeals to a moral code against the violation of that code. However experience teaches us that any morality is made to be transgressed, and that any code of ethics is fixed according to inevitable and foreseen lapses. In the fake *Monde Diplomatique*, we didn't reproach the press for playing its role badly. On the contrary we noted that it fulfilled it. The revolutionary movement does not appeal to an idea of justice against breaches of that idea. It demonstrates that the university, the school, the army, the law, the press, art, etc. etc., can only play the role of guarantors of social order. Vieille Taupe 2 went from this to demanding that the journalist produce the true duty of the journalist. There is no difference between this demand and democratic campaigns for « true » information, for a press that is « free from power and money », for « access to culture by all », etc.

The important thing is not the fact that people believe or not in the existence of gas chambers, but the reasons why they *value* this belief *so highly*. It is not a matter of setting about the truth or falsity of this belief, but of the historic causes which make it a taboo.

The Faurisson affair had harmful effects within society as well as in the work of those who criticised it. At a time when the « Jewish community » was about to constitute just one more ghetto, one more « identity », at a time when the revolutionary movement had the task of affirming the human species against the crystallization of « communities » whether they be homosexual, Arab or Jewish. . . . at this very moment the harmful influence of Faurisson exerted itself in the

revolutionary ranks. Vieille Taupe 2 started looking for Jewish sounding names to sign its letters and petitions. However, to speak of « Jews » as a banal reality, whereas this is the first notion to be criticised, a notion whose questioning undermines anti-Semitism and Zionism at the same time, here was a practise which Faurisson helped reinforce among those who found him interesting.

The conception of the Second World War as an « irreconcilable war between Hitler and the Jews » proceeds, following the example of Hitler or Begin, through the forced integration of everyone born to Jewish parents into the « Jewish » bloc, by commanding that person to conform, for good or bad fortune, to a community of « Jewish » destiny which falls into the category of myth. Speaking of « the Jews » is to justify the claims and practises of both the Third Reich and the State of Israel in imposing their law on any individual who cannot prove their non-membership of this « community ».

Just as much as the bombing in the rue Copernic or the shooting in the Rue des Rosiers, the Faurisson scandal achieved the opposite of what revolutionaries might wish for : it froze « persons born of Jewish parents » into a defensive hysteria. Amongst other things, it is because of Faurisson that today people still seek an identity according to criteria which resemble the racial laws of the Third Reich like two peas in a pod.

re-collecting our past (18)  
history and personal narrative of the last fifteen years

## The spring of *la Guerre Sociale*

The Organisation of Young Revolutionary Workers (OJTR) had disappeared at about the same time as Mouvement Communiste. At the beginning of 1974 the OJTR organised a national meeting which was a failure. Fortunately this did not prevent it from publishing *A World Without Money* (3 booklets, 1975-6), in which for the first time, perhaps, and unlike utopian and anarchist writings, the concrete mechanism of a communist revolution was envisaged.

The author of this text, Dominique Blanc, then organised *King Kong International* (1976). Typical of the period, the editorial, a synthesis of essential communist positions, stood in sharp contrast to other minor articles, and to a text on LIP which produced no critique of this rescue operation of a company by its employees. It is never enough to indicate the profoundly proletarian causes of social acts, it is still necessary to speak of what effects they lead to. In the LIP affair, as in many other cases, capitalism succeeded in penetrating inside the workers' action and made it a capitalist enterprise (in both senses of the word) which also, by virtue of the national and international impact it experienced, had an anti-revolutionary function. [Note 1]

With the second issue the journal changed its name to *la Guerre Sociale* (Issue 1 1977). A text on the abolition of wage labour, distributed in large quantities on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1977, was rerun as an editorial. It coexisted with at least two deeply erroneous texts, one on automation and one on the refusal of work, which was one-sidedly interpreted as proof that Capital was at death's door. The clarification in issue 2 did not develop matters.

Among the past and present participants in *la Guerre Sociale*, some had taken part in *Vieille Taupe* and *le Mouvement Communiste*. In addition, Gilles Dauvé contributed to *Guerre Sociale* by giving the first versions, subsequently modified, of the texts on the State (published in issue 2) and on the camps (issue 3, 1979).

Reading *la Guerre Sociale* and *La Banquise* will clearly show the connections and convergences between them. In addition to the matters we speak of below (and which are not trivial), *La Banquise* addresses two criticisms to *Guerre Sociale* : firstly, *Guerre Sociale* does not get to the bottom of the analysis of demand struggles; secondly, it has poorly broken away from propaganda.

If *Guerre Social* is tempted by triumphalism (the articles already mentioned in Issue 1, the articles on Denain-Longwy on Issue 2), this is probably more than a sign of excessive optimism. The critique of the workers' movement, including wildcat movements, has not been carried to its conclusion. *Guerre Sociale* wrote in its fourth issue (1982) :

« It seems to us that, regardless of the forms of organisation, whether trade unionist or autonomous, the proletariat also expresses itself in its elementary struggle of resistance to exploitation. Even if in this way, it does not appear

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Note 1 See the issue of *Négation* devoted to LIP.

revolutionary. »

This is a theory that is, at the very least questionable, and requires discussion. (See our positions on the definition of the proletariat). Elementary resistance is a condition of the communist movement, but it is only a condition. We don't applaud all workers' struggle (which can be or become anti-proletarian), nor even all class struggle (which can be reformist or even end up by imprisoning proletarians still further within capitalism).

One cannot make a dead end of this issue. No regroupment will be made solely on the basis of an understanding of communism and the revolution. Still it is necessary to agree about what there is between now and a revolution; about what the proletariat does and does not do.

In its first issues *Guerre Sociale* preferred to publish minor texts at the expense of others that were more fundamental (on the Situationist International for example), which were reserved for a more limited distribution. *Guerre Sociale* often lagged behind *A World Without Money*. The text on the crisis (issue 3) left to one side the main elements of a previous duplicated analysis by Dominique Blanc on the subject. *Guerre Sociale* produced too much simplification, and too much propaganda.

« It was a conference, that is to say of education and popularisation. I would have liked that this conference while teaching me something, would also have taught you something. This criteria of discovery is the only one which appears valid to me when I write. » (letter of Antonin Artaud to André Rolland de Renéville, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1933).

At the end of 1979, after issue 3, Dominique Blanc sent a circular letter to the members of the group and to a series of people who had collaborated with him in the past, as well as those he knew among the editors of the fake *Monde Diplomatique*. *Guerre Sociale*, he said, was undergoing the consequences of the general passivity. It was in crisis and he wondered whether it was necessary to give it up or continue it. A correspondence followed. The future editors of *La Banquise* recognised the importance of the existence of a journal like *la Guerre Sociale* but addressed to it the criticisms summarised above.

In the spring of 1980, a meeting took place in Paris, the minutes of which were written shortly afterwards by the Lyons members of *Guerre Sociale*. No minute are impartial, and ours would have been different, but these are honest and we reproduce them in an annexe.

The meeting had proceeded in a general climate of goodwill, honest critique and a refusal of polemic. Those who today produce *La Banquise* had the feeling that we perhaps were entering a new period during which a revolutionary regroupment was going to take place. In the following weeks texts were written and dispatched to all the participants :

- a text by Gilles Dauvé on the concentration camps and their myth (subsequently published in two issues of *La Frondeur*; some pages were incorporated in « The Horror is Human » in the first issue of *La Banquise*). This text lapsed too much into mass psychology but initiated a critique of Rassinier and Faurisson;

- another text by him on « Proletariat and Communism » taking up former manuscripts;
- a text by Jean-Pierre Carasso and Serge Quadruppani, which after modification became « *For a World Without Moral Order* » in the first issue of *La Banquise*;
- a text by Gilles Dauvé on war, part of which became « War and Fear » (Issue 1 of *La Banquise*, an extract of which would be published in *Indolencia*, in Barcelona, and would be presented in error as having emanated from *Guerre Sociale*).

Commitments seemed to have been honoured. But...

Dominique Blanc firstly considered that « Proletariat and Communism » threw the proletariat out of the window, then some time after, declared that the text on morals was closer to the positions held by Bruckner (a modernist intellectual) than of *Guerre Sociale*, that this mush of « immoralist moralism was worth nothing and explained nothing » and he finished by characterising it as « Vaneigemist wanking » (in other words sub-Situationist). His criticisms were expressed with a less and less controlled aggression and left little room for argument. The text on morals did indeed contain some very erroneous passages which have since been corrected (amongst other things an uncritical presentation of the myth of the « recalcitrant », and even a half-identification of the recalcitrant with the revolutionary) but draft texts did not deserve such fury.

In addition, disagreements were further aggravated by the Faurisson affair. By mutual agreement between Pierre Guillaume and us it had not been discussed at the meeting, since we were still awaiting (March 1980) Pierre's answers to our criticisms. Shortly afterwards, since Pierre continued with fine energy along the path he had taken, we considered that it was impossible to conceal our disagreements with him any longer. Believing in preparing the future and not wasting it, we brought all of it to the attention of those who had taken part in the March meeting. Pierre reacted with a new letter which we also circulated. We wanted to lance the abscess. It was nearly impossible for us to believe that *Vieille Taupe 2* would persist for long in its aberrations. We thought that on the whole the members of *Guerre Sociale* would agree with us on the content of our disagreement with Pierre, would make this known to him and that he would find himself up against the wall.

But Dominique Blanc, while holding Pierre to be wrong on the question of intervening in the media, concentrated all of his energy on criticising our attitude and declared that Pierre's was more « sympathetic » than ours. To our great astonishment, he hardly drew any conclusion about the content (should one support Faurisson ?) but declared Rassinier more subversive and Pierre more sympathetic than us.

He chose to take what, for us, was a call for an essential discussion and a warning, as an indictment, made against Pierre by people who were equally guilty of the things for which they reproached him (letters to the press, errors that were indeed open to criticism). Dominique Blanc had rightly reproached one of his comrades for having attempted to get the *Nouvel Observateur* to mention *Guerre Sociale*. Then what is to be said about a systematic publicity campaign for Faurisson ?

Imagine a group publishing an article against democracy, one of whose most eminent members, without whom the article could not have been produced, then stands as a candidate in an election ? This was the unacceptable confusion which Pierre created by taking part in a revolutionary grouping while conducting a campaign for the democratization of the media in favour of Faurisson. Here lay an ambiguity that needed be resolved. Dominique Blanc refused to do so. As a result the following autumn *Guerre Sociale* joined Vieille Taupe 2 in the confusionist activism in defence of Faurisson.

The critique of « human rights » today forms part of minimum revolutionary positions, for us, as without doubt for *Guerre Sociale*. How can a group then allow itself to be more and more openly drawn into a campaign for human rights ? And why exactly should the human in question be Faurisson ?

An agreement had been entered into in March. We had the impression that we had fulfilled it. We were alone in this view. Whatever the disagreements with *Guerre Sociale*, they did not justify an attitude which can be summarized as follows : *Guerre Sociale* deliberately chose not to associate with people which it characterised as sub-Situationist intellectuals or as drifting dangerously towards Camattism. The text on morals, amended, is in issue 1, the ideas on the proletariat are in issues 1 and 2. Everyone can judge for themselves the verdict passed on us by Dominique Blanc.

There undoubtedly exist between us important disagreements, as much over the conception of the proletariat as over the critique of moeurs. These disagreements would most probably have prevented a close collaboration, at any rate in the same journal. But there was an opportunity to discuss essential subjects and Dominique Blanc's attitude prevented that.

In the circular letter which put a full stop to our relations with *Guerre Sociale* and its network of correspondents we included these lines which summarize our feelings about this episode : « That the whims of an individual and the « obscure settling of emotional accounts » still have so such importance demonstrates the weakness of the revolutionary current. In the whole of this sad business this is what troubles us most. » As long as the revolutionary current is weak, confrontations of personality and character will retain their importance. Sometimes it is necessary to produce a little psychology in order not to have to do so later on. But in particular, it is necessary to find a mode of relations between individuals and groups which marginalises paralysing emotional behaviour. The gathering together of some individuals in *La Banquise* is not an end in itself. We are open to any relations with groups and individuals, but it is necessary that these relations are conducted on terms which show that from the start we have a minimum in common. There are rules of behaviour to be found between revolutionaries. After having characterised us as Vaneigemist wankers and declared us to be less subversive than Rassinier, Dominique Blanc appeared astonished that we thereafter refused any discussion with him. He has just written us a letter of abuse concerning the first issue of *La Banquise*. To this letter [<sup>Note 2</sup>] as to those which preceded it we will not be replying. Everyone knows those leftists who patiently draw themselves up to heap insults on their interlocutors before boldly returning to the argument. We don't practise this kind of angelism, not (or not only) out of self-esteem, but because one can only

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<sup>Note 2</sup> Like the whole of the documents relative to the questions tackled by *La Banquise*, it goes without saying that this letter is at the disposal of anyone interested in it.

discuss effectively with those people with whom one at least has a common language. To insults, we could only reply with insults, and we also do not want to sink into that sort of petty sub-Situationist game.

After the very friendly meeting in March 1980, with only one exception, the friends and members of *Guerre Sociale* to whom the texts and the copies of the correspondence with Pierre Guillaume and Dominique Blanc had been sent, expressed no reaction. Nothing. Why did they play the *white zombies* we know them not to be. In its exposition of what had occurred between issues 3 and 4 *Guerre Sociale* makes the following allusion to this wasted spring : « Instead of growing in size, we managed to damage some of our relationships and even those with whom a more remote and more occasional collaboration might have been possible » (issue 4, 1982, p. 43). The reader of *la Guerre Sociale* would learn no more.

*La Banquise*, like any consistent revolutionary journal, works for its own disappearance. Our activity only makes sense in terms of a movement which one day will encompass all of the energies expressed here or there in the form of groups or journals. We have nothing to do with the great family of the ultra-left. On the other hand, we know that a sudden appearance by the proletariat will soon settle the differences which separate us from the other segments of the revolutionary movement. While waiting, we will continue to seek among ourselves, and with those we meet, a coherence that is never given from the start, but can only be reached by clarifying points of disagreement as far as is possible, and working through them. The original *Vieille Taupe*, *le Mouvement Communiste*, *Guerre Sociale* and those who today produce *La Banquise* have all made errors. The most serious of them would be to leave these errors in the dark.

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## Meeting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1980 - Paris

About 20 participants including 3 from the South-West, 3 from Lyons and the rest from Paris. This report only deals with the meeting on Saturday 22, the discussion on the Sunday (with the participation of a comrade from Aix-en-Provence) being more casual. We should indicate the very limited number of women (2) and the relatively « advanced age » of the participants.

The discussion began with a critique of *la Guerre Sociale*.

A critique of the contents of the review which became tangled up with a critique of its functioning.

– Jean-Pierre, Serge, Christine, Gilles do not wish to position themselves in relation to the [question of the] existence of the review in itself but in relation to what it has to say. Alongside important texts like « Misery of Feminism », Question of the State » and « The Camps... » coexist articles in which the arguments do not do justice to the assertions, or which contain things that are completely false. This concerns the editorials on New York (issue 2), on Denain-Longwy and Iran (issue 3) in which reality is amplified with an optimism which masks a lack of analysis, but which comes to reinforce a more general optimism about the revolution, leading to the manufacture of a reassuring communist ideology for the group and its readers. (A point of view shared by Dominique from Lyons).

– Dominique K explained that his optimism was not short-sighted. If this world is heavy with revolution, this is not because he sees it arriving with Denain, but because of the contradictions of capitalism. DK recognises the weakness of these articles or the false passages (the army collapsed at lightning speed in Iran). Pierre pointed out the mystery of the ultra-powerful Iranian army which apparently vanished into thin air : « What became of the 7<sup>th</sup> company ? » (Pat) But these deficiencies were the product of a concrete situation (the relation of forces in the first issue), [the article on] Denain-Longwy had been intended to be a poster-leaflet – which explains its tone –the commitments not held to – and the absence of some who should have been present in the journal. Pierre in order to summarise the situation spoke about the role of DK as editor in chief. « The beginning of the beginning is nonetheless the existence of a journal. . . » (DK)

– Gilles said that one cannot be content to line up lists of workers' struggles, and that their violent character against the State did not necessarily make them struggles for communism. « The steelworkers are fighting to remain steelworkers. » The response of Quim is mentioned : « because one always struggles against ». – Henri : in elementary proletarian struggle there is something else; by their situation within production, the fractions of the proletariat temporarily break the functioning of the economy even if reformism is the logical conclusion (contradiction of the proletariat between capitalism and communism). Gilles spoke of the crisis of the proletariat. Everyone agreed in recognising this as the number one problem (as can be seen at the level of the concepts or terminology in which people interchangeably employ working class, proletariat, workers...)

Gilles is astonished that essential texts like « Chant Funèbre » and on the « S.I » have not appeared. Pierre spoke of the S.I as « style » and of its subversive relation to communication. If the ultra-left and the « milieu » have an especially defensive relation to the world, the S.I. had shown a more offensive attitude. All those who had read Dominique K's text agreed in finding it important (Gilles, Gérald) even if its style left something to be desired. But Dominique prefers to devote himself to rewriting « A World Without Money ». Alain (Quillan South West) did not agree with the publication of the text on the S.I. in the journal, he fears that one would bring the myth back to life, and that the journal remains connected to the same interlocutors and did not go beyond a certain milieu (a point of view shared by Jacques (South-West) François (Lyon). Gilles pointed out that he had written a text on the S.I. which circulated in English.

### **The Problem of Intervention**

In a slightly delirious form the South-West platform had raised the problem as well as the questions « Who does the journal serve ? Who is it addressed to ? » raised by Sylvie. Jacques thinks that it cannot remain a theoretical journal without posing the problem of its links with the social movement, of practical intervention in struggles and of the organisation of communist fractions. Jean-Pierre responded, if it was a question of acts of intervention, they could not be spoken about in the abstract, it was necessary that there were specific things to discuss and decide. Jacques is happy to accept that initially one proceeds via a theoretical journal. In passing the remark of Gilles : one should not pose the existence of the review in terms of the brainy types who think and write for the others, it must enable the possibility of a debate and a circulation of ideas and projects, even if some have more capacity to formulate them. Indeed several people said nothing at the meeting yet afterwards had an opinion on this or that question. Workers and those who have never immersed themselves in politics and the obsession with holding meetings will always be less at ease in meetings. Don't they just as much have a point of view ? Dominique K evoked his permanent concern to be understood by people who have no reference to the « classics ». He worries if theory is not communicable to those who socially can understand it best (Problem of the autonomisation of theory, having few ties with the social movement – and proletarian atomisation reinforces this situation – to be tackled on Sunday).

– Dominique spoke of rules to be established in order to hold to what one is committed and to avoid certain stupidities evoked in his letter. Jean-Pierre explained the circumstances in which interventions were made in the newspapers in connection with the Faurisson affair and its repercussions. The discussion became bogged down over the question of formal rules for example that the precise use of financial resources is known. In fact behind the formal rules are rather principles that it is necessary to make obvious when one goes beyond the circle of close friends. Behind the rule about not intervening in the press (apart from the defence of a revolutionary in danger) it is a question of the principle of the communication of communist ideas.

Agreement was reached on the principle of a collective activity, the problem being not to fill a possible fourth issue but that there is a debate on the important questions tackled and thus of the concrete contributions which will logically will provide a lot more material than a fourth issue.

– J-P, Serge, José, Gilles... mention their organised discussions on war with a text of Gilles.

– J.P and Serge are to produce a text on moeurs. It is possible that they will integrate it into a more general text on the crisis (social crisis – economic crisis).

– Gilles will re-examine his « Crisis of the Proletariat »

– Henri will send notes on the recomposition of the proletariat beginning with the transformation of the labour process.

– a continuation of the article on the camps is called for, the article ending on « the need to disassemble the mechanisms which assure the production and reproduction of ideology and its deliriums, we always await the watchmaker » An appeal is made to Pierre.

– the text on the SI must be re-examined. Comparison with the text by Gilles and the insights of Pierre. For its publication it is proposed that it come out as a booklet. But who will rewrite it ?

– the text on ecology by DK is thought good by those who have read it. With the help of some improvements it can come out (send suggestions to Dominique), an Italian translation is awaited. A leaflet poster on ecology is proposed with which one can intervene (the Ecology Days at Perpignan – the national ecology conference at Lyon 1, 2, 3, 4 May).

All contributions must be sent quickly to the journals box number. José is in charge of distributing texts with the assistance and support of the people from Paris (photocopying). May 15<sup>th</sup> debate on texts.

Note – travelling by comrades from the provinces involved greater costs and energy than for the Parisians (the more so since the majority of them are unemployed). The minimum should be that costs are shared. On this occasion it is proposed that the Parisian contribution is transferred to the Spanish edition of « The Question of the State » « Misery of Feminism... »

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## The autumn of *la Guerre Sociale*

1980 in France : A strategy of tension aimed at the Jewish « community » is at work. What begins with the nocturnal machine-gunning of synagogues and schools culminates with the bombing in the rue Copernic. Israeli State, Arab State, French politics, hard-line Palestinians, whatever the forces behind these acts, it is clear that, as later during the war in Lebanon, they aimed at securing a defensive crystallisation of the Jewish community which all kinds of political apparatuses and ideologists then applied themselves to manipulating. After the bombing, a large demonstration of the *Union Sacrée* took place. In opposition to the resurgence of a mythical neo-Nazi barbarism paraded many people who had defended other cruelties, partisans of Stalinism yesterday and today, former member of governments which had covered up torture in Algeria, defenders of a Zionism which before possessing a State that tortured Palestinians, had been a terrorist movement which slaughtered many « innocent » victims.

In September 1980, on the initiative of *Guerre Sociale*, a leaflet entitled « Our Kingdom is a Prison » was published, signed by various ultra-left groups and widely distributed, in particular at the demonstration after the rue Copernic bombing. This leaflet which denounced antifascism would have been good, if it had not entered into the debate over the gas chambers, and if it had not contained a perfectly *Faurissonian* passage about the camps :

« The deportation and concentration of millions of people can't be reduced to a diabolical Nazi idea, it was above all lack of the labour necessary for war industry which produced the need for it. With diminishing control of the situation, as the war continued and gathered together against it much greater forces, fascism could not sufficiently feed the deportees or properly distribute food. » (Cited in *Mise au Point*).

This passage was used as a pretext to reject everything valid in the leaflet. But even so ! To come to speak like Faurisson... Representing a regression as compared to issue 3 of *Guerre Sociale* which dealt with deportation in all its aspects, the first sentence of this passage quite simply skips over the Jewish question. Nazi anti-Semitism no longer exists. Yet didn't it play a role in the « deportation and concentration » ? The official version explains everything through Nazi racism. To forget Nazi racism is to take the opposite of the official version not to criticise it. An historical « omission » on this scale doesn't put one in a good position to write a hard hitting leaflet on the opposition between democracy and dictatorship. The democrats naturally jumped on this lacuna.

The second sentence of this passage is just as deplorable. From the thesis : Nazism *wanted* to kill, we pass to : Nazism *could* no longer feed the deportees. Two equally reductive explanations. How can we explain these preposterous statements, except through the *Faurissonian* influence in our ranks ?

After Copernic and the orgy of sanctimoniousness which followed it, the best response was the publication in *Libération* of an account of the massacre of Algerians in Paris in October 1961. That *Libération* did better than the

revolutionaries says a great deal about the disintegration of this current.

Violently anti-Semitic doctrines had helped bring Hitler to power. These doctrines, borne by a popular hysteria which they then inflamed, drove Hitler to acts which cannot always be explained, even indirectly, by military or economic motives, but which often concerned an ideological logic. Ideology is not a mask, or rather the ideology and the skin soon become one. Anti-Semitism, one of the things which cemented together the team in power, as well as social order in the country, had its own requirements. It *also* led to the forced emigration and repression, to the concentration and extermination of a large number of Jews. To consider that ideology has a relative autonomy is not in contradiction with a materialist view of the world. The concentrationist events in Nazi Germany involved purely economic and military needs, but they didn't only involve that. There wasn't a conspiracy to exterminate that was hatched from the origins of Nazism, but there was more than a chain of circumstances due to the war. A continuity of verbal violence was transformed into physical violence at first sporadic (Kristelnacht in 1938) and then general (the camps).

In the midst of the passions aroused by Copernic and by the general hostility to Faurisson, and in an atmosphere of hunting for neo-Nazis, « Our Kingdom is a Prison » stirred up a series of attacks on *Guerre Sociale* in the press. Curiously *Guerre Sociale* countered with a leaflet distributed to the typesetters at *Libération* and the editors of *Charlie-Hebdo*, newspapers which had become caught up in this. The « Our Kingdom... » leaflet having been distributed at a demonstration of left-wing lawyers, and *Le Monde* having presented it as a « pro-fascist » text, members of *Guerre Sociale* went to *Le Monde* and obtained the correction which one can read below. *Guerre Sociale* had correctly characterised our letters addressed to *Libération* at the start of the Faurisson affair as « stupidity ». And yet here it was taking up this practise, not as we had done in order to defend individuals, but in order to use the media to make their basic positions known !

*The authors of the leaflet entitled « Our Kingdom is a Prison » distributed on October 10<sup>th</sup> at the Palace of Justice in Paris by two persons who were immediately challenged, have asked us to clarify that this is not a matter of a « pro-fascist » text (*Le Monde* 12-13<sup>th</sup> October). These leaflets denounced « the rumour of the gas chambers (...) a mythical horror which made it possible to mask the real and banal cause of the war », but they ended with a call for « communist struggle by proletarians, the destruction of wage labour, of commodities and of States ». Several libertarian organisations had taken part in drafting this leaflet.*

*Le Monde, Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October 1980.*

*Guerre Sociale* and the others – in particular the group *Jeune Taupe/Pour une Intervention Communiste* – genuinely mobilised for Faurisson, bringing him and *Vieille Taupe 2* « revolutionary » support and backing. They turned themselves into experts before a court which they should have challenged, in the same way as with any other court.

By entering the problematic of the existence of the gas chambers, *Guerre Sociale* was obliged to become a new expert. Obviously a minimum of documentation is necessary in order that you know what you are talking about. But until the arrival of Faurisson, the majority of French revolutionaries distinguished between questions which made sense inside particular specialisms, and those which made sense for everybody, and they were only interested in the latter. Everything that we understand about the world, and the possibility of transforming it, never concerns specialised knowledge, because everything that we know is inseparable from what we have done and experienced. Faurisson, the victim of the illusion of his own speciality (and what a speciality !) is no more than an *agent of details*. His critique of texts can at best dissect writings, never elucidate historical processes. Revolutionary critique challenges all experts and all courts. However some radical groups went from this to supporting an expert in the Nuremberg tribunal.

All textual critique presupposes an aesthetic, a norm, it is never the work of a « neutral » researcher. Faurisson believes in a natural text, in an undoctored narrative, in a state of words which precedes interpretation and whose discovery would finally clarify the problem : the document revealing the raw fact. This is the illusion of a « real » existing in a pure form, prior to and underneath the interpretations that recover it, and which can be extracted in that pure state.

There is no knowledge of history independent of the meaning one gives it. The worst contemporary mystification, that which is the theoretical presupposition of all the others, is objectivity, the negation of the subjective-objective element of all thought. This is what State schools and the bourgeoisie try to impose on us.

In 1981 a *Mise au point de la Guerre Sociale* showed that it had entered into a polemic in which it had no function. « ...one could appreciate and support the work of Faurisson on an anti-capitalist basis...» (p. 41).

Like *Vieille Taupe 2*, *Guerre Sociale* rearranged Rassinier's biography by minimising his anti-Semitism. But is even a minimal anti-Semitism acceptable ? Would *Guerre Sociale* defend with such ardour a historian who was a « little bit » Stalinist writing about the victims of Stalinism ?

Instead of making the distinction between our question and the question raised by Faurisson, *Guerre Sociale* made a critique of him without showing the *radical* difference in point of view. Faurisson and revolutionaries do not look at things in the same way, thus they cannot see the same things.

On the statement : « Hitler never ordered nor admitted that anyone was to be killed because of his race or his religion », *Guerre Sociale* wrote that Faurisson « says the opposite of the widespread current image of the "final solution" and Hitler (...) in any event this sentence is far too categorical (...) » (pp 38-39). The least one can say is that « too categorical » is a wholly inadequate critique of such an outrageous and erroneous assertion.

It is society, says *Guerre Sociale*, which « makes a question of principle » out of the gas chambers (p. 40). The article in its third issue had not made them an essential matter. But from the moment that revolutionaries « supported » Faurisson, himself obsessed by gas, they threw themselves into what was a « question of principle » for « society », but not for them. Where did that lead them ? When *Guerre Sociale* was unaware of Faurisson, it said rather more about the camps. Everything which is important about Nazism and 1939-45 in this *Mise au Point*, is *without recourse* to Faurisson.

This same booklet reproduced a hitherto unpublished letter by Pierre Guillaume dating from 1979, which set out his initial theoretical position in this affair (before the meeting with Faurisson). If this text really summarised Pierre's activity (however criticisable), that activity would still have been on the terrain of communist critique. Published a year and a half later, his letter now appears as a spurious justification for *Vieille Taupe 2*. Spurious because it *does not contain* the Faurissonian cohesion which developed subsequently, and which it now serves to *cover over* with a theoretical cloak, with the assistance of *Guerre Sociale*. Everything the letter says about the revolutionary reasons for an interest in the concentrationist question *does not justify* the exclusive interest in gassing, even less the exclusive interest in Faurisson's research into gassing. Today this letter, which we had often asked Pierre to publish because it tackled the problem from our point of view, is a mystification.

In this letter however, Pierre already denied Rassinier's anti-Semitism. Moreover, confusion already appears in a passage which it is remarkable that we did not notice at the time. Concluding a discursion on the trial of Lischka [one of those in charge of the deportation of French Jews - translator], Pierre adds :

« (...) You will note that it is I who gives my support to Kurt Lischka. And I hope that in his trial the rights of the defence are scrupulously respected. »  
(p. 90)

A 1981 footnote clarifies this : indeed this much criticised passage now seems to Pierre to be very open to criticism. « What I meant to say in any case, was that, while I have nothing in common with a Lischka, I want to have nothing in common with the horrible sanctimony of the Nazi hunters. »

Between the dissatisfactions of a mainly theoretical activity (journals, sometimes leaflets), and violent self-destruction (terrorism), the problem of the gas chambers appeared to offer some revolutionaries a springboard which might be used to advance the communist movement. Not only did the gas chambers not advance the revolutionary critique of Nazism, and of the mechanism of horror, it provoked a regression. People lost sight of the totality. The demand for the « right to research », and for « freedom of expression » was to lead to its logical conclusion, *the defence of human rights*.

In West Germany professional blacklists affected thousands of progressives, leftists and revolutionaries for over ten years. It was necessary to wait until the author of an iconoclastic book about Auschwitz found the same treatment applied to him, before *Vieille Taupe 2* launched a campaign in France for the defence of democratic liberties in West Germany.

While writing favourable reviews in *Guerre Sociale* of books he had published, Pierre Guillaume not only fought for the « freedom of the researcher, the code of ethics of the historian and for freedom of expression », but also for the training « of many lawyers (...) brought to work on the seriously truncated text of a judgement published in the *Recueil Dalloz-Sirey*. » (Leaflet of November 12<sup>th</sup> 1982). The counter-trial of Nuremberg, conducted through a legal battle which *Guerre Sociale* never publicly criticised, led all the way to legalism.

As the notes in issue one of *La Banquise* indicated (pp. 60-63) official history is constantly and seamlessly revised. *Vieille Taupe 2* and *Guerre Sociale* wanted to act in such a way that this revision could not take place smoothly. However, within democracy the dominant ideology includes its own critique. From which comes the risk that the exercise of the critical mind only becomes confused with the normal evolution of ideology and of the spectacle, and becomes no more than a moment of it, albeit the most extreme, that which shakes things up, but only in order to make them go on towards a supplementary « revision ».

In order not to break up on this reef, critique must take on the very principle of revision, and not dedicate itself to demanding one. The « revisionists » don't denounce the « Ideas » page of *Le Monde* : their great victory would be to appear in it. The entire programme of *Vieille Taupe 2*, supported by the infantrymen of *Guerre Sociale*, is reduced to seeking this kind of victory.

The case of the massacre at Sabra and Chatila is exemplary. The Israeli State recognised and (to some extent) sanctioned this appalling crime. That is the difference between a democracy and a dictatorship. Democracy also massacres and *says so*. To what effect ? The purification of the State and the reinforcement of the system as a whole.

What does it mean to fight for the recognition of the right to open a debate ? To shift public opinion, to produce that which will one day shape opinion. Perhaps tomorrow it will be accepted that there were no gas chambers in the Nazi concentration camps. Such a revision will only reinforce confidence in serious historical research and the eternal virtues of democracy. The « stage setting by which the modern world uses the misery and horror it produces in order to defend itself against a real critique of that misery and of that horror », will by no means change because one element of its décor is withdrawn !

In 1949, it was essential that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* asserted that Russia was a capitalist country. Thirty years later, this opinion is widely held, even in the work of people who don't draw from this any revolutionary conclusions. But in order that things are clearer today, including in the heads of revolutionaries, it was necessary to state that opinion, against the current, in 1949. That was a fundamental question regarding the nature of a regime under which millions of beings lived. There is nothing comparable in the question of the gas chambers, a typical product of the world of ideology and information. One can raise subversive questions from the nature of the USSR. In the question of the existence of the gas chambers, there is only the question of the existence of the gas chambers.

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## The ultra-left

We've already said that we have nothing to modify or add to the discourse of the left, which proves every day through its actions and ideas that it works for the conservation of capitalism. The bourgeoisie tries to get workers to participate in its attempts to exit from the crisis. Giscard tried this through demagogy (the revaluation of manual work), while Mitterand directly involved the representatives of labour in the management of the crisis. However, perpetually attacking left and right wing parties and trade unions, by making out that they are constantly « exposing » their anti-revolutionary function, is to reduce the critique of them to the denunciation of a scandal, while forgetting to explain what the scandal is a product of. This kind of attitude prevents any profound understanding of what the left really is.

The revolutionary movement also has nothing in common with leftism, which devotes itself to support. What hasn't it supported, from workers struggles to Mitterand, passing through Maoism on the way. . . Revolutionaries have nothing to support. Where a struggle has a universal content, they can find a common language with those conducting it, and the activity of revolutionaries naturally prolongs the struggles in which they recognise themselves. But within our ranks anti-leftism, spread over page after page, serves all too often as a convenient pretext for not facing up to an examination of the situation of the proletariat today. Leftism presents the Communist Party and the trade unions as a screen standing between it and the masses. Revolutionaries don't need to imitate this by making out that leftism is Capital's ultimate weapon, and that it's necessary to denounce it tirelessly.

Permanent denunciation is hypnotised by the object of its critique. It only goes to show that you are overcome by the thing you attack the most.

Critique of the left is meaningless if it just denounces it on a daily basis, even if the left does participate in government. To understand the Popular Front, or Molletism or Mitterandism, on the one hand means understanding the way in which social conflicts are channelled towards capitalist and statist objectives, and on the other means going to the source of the left's ideas, which in their essence are invariant, as *Programme Communiste* once showed in a series of articles on the French labour movement. The positions of the contemporary French left can all be found in Hugo, Zola, Jaures and so on. So, for example, when people talk of struggle in the field of ideas it would be better to show the moral integration of the workers by capitalism in *Les Misérables*, than to triumphantly hold up the umpteenth « scandalous » declaration of the Communist Party. It is enough to see what the people of the left teach, and would more and more like to see taught in schools : the recognition of labour by Capital.

Groups like the [Bordigist] PCI or the International Communist Current are sects because, despite anything positive they may say or do, their existence amounts to a continual demarcation of themselves with regard to the rest of the world. They *exhort* the proletariat to constitute themselves as a class. Their principal enemy is always the group *closest to them*. They live in and through competition. In their

organisational life only their crises are positive : for example that which led Bérard to leave the ICC in 1974 to form *Une Tendance Communiste*, or that taking place in the PCI today.

« The sect sees the justification for its existence and its "point of honour"-- not in what it has in *common* with the class movement but in the *particular shibboleth* which *distinguishes* it from it. » (Marx, letter to Schweitzer, October 13th 1868.)

Without being quite so confined within *politics*, the ultra-left has poorly understood the critique which La Vieille Taupe once addressed to Pouvoir Ouvrier. A newspaper like *Révolution Sociale*, in the strict sense, has no readership. Something it has just acknowledged by ceasing to appear. This kind of newspaper adds nothing to the force of revolutionary work, because it only tackles basic questions through the medium of topicality. And it cannot reach all proletarians, most of whom are scarcely breaking with society, even though it is produced as if it were to be read by hundreds of thousands of them. It contains no satisfactory theory, nor does it advance the movement.

Such groups live within the illusion of *propaganda*. The revolutionary movement does not transform false ideas into true. It sets out the direction of the social movement of which it forms a part, and sets out what that movement will be « historically constrained » to do in order to succeed, which excludes any *exhortation*.

The publication of texts does not just circulate ideas. This is even their secondary function. The dissemination of ideas establishes links for something other than just thinking. But this « socialisation » is much richer if the theoretical content has not been skimped.

The revolutionary movement is caught between two tendencies which it will be necessary to go beyond. One tendency constantly resets its watch, while casting a retrospective glance back over 150 years of Capital, working class and revolution. It concludes that there is a need to supersede the past. Its assessments always end by posing « Socialism or Barbarism » , whether it be in 1914, 1917, 1945 or 1983.

The other tendency, more traditional, always describes movements which have ended. Poland, Portugal... each case demonstrating the limitations of proletarians and what they could do, if only... It calls for what has been done previously to be done better.

The first attitude separates the past from the present. It puts forward a past which was radically different from the present. The second attitude repeats what it has always said. The first effects an historic break. The second has a quantitative viewpoint: as it was before but next time much further. The first breaks with all filiation, the second acknowledges and claims it. It is the opposition between founders and inheritors. These two tendencies can be illustrated by taking two recent revolutionary works.

*En finir avec le travail et son monde* (Finishing with work and its world) by the CRCRE (no. 1 June 1982, no. 2 December 1982) well expresses the first attitude. A great many remarks, which in themselves are true, are used to explain and justify

everything. The failures of the past all had causes which have now disappeared. This is an argument constructed after the event. They admit no past or present errors (either by themselves, or by us all). Everything happened as it had to. They draw the meaning of their activity from themselves. It means the creation of a « new frame of reference » , and a new view of the world. We are not far from philosophy.

*Poland 1980-82* by Henri Simon (Spartacus, 1982, English translation Black & Red 1985), is an embodiment of the second tendency. It closely analyses the Polish movement, which gives the text its great interest, but this does not prevent it from confusing the pressure exerted on Capital by labour with a questioning of the relation of Capital to labour. We cannot be content to say « each struggle is only one step, as long as Capital survives » (p. ?). This is true, but not every struggle is a step towards communist action.

For Simon « To do (...) something that makes one's work and life easier, is acting in one's class interest and undermining the foundations of the capitalist system. » (p. 86 Black & Red edition)

This sentence sums up a view *which should no longer go without saying* in our movement. « Class action » cannot be solely identified with struggles for demands, but nor is it their opposite, it does not exclude them. Rather it is born from and against them, and is their supersession.

Simon's work also reproduces the ultra-left error taken up by the Situationist International : « In fact, while maintaining its position and (presumably) preserving intact its repressive apparatus, Capital had essentially lost all real power. Even the new union Solidarity, (...) was already, even before functioning as an apparatus, reduced to the same role as the pre-July 1980 institutions. » (p. 89 Black and Red edition)

Revolutionaries have difficulty in taking Capital seriously, and in seeing its strength where it really lies : in its dynamism as much as in its force of inertia. The « real power » of Capital undoubtedly lies in both these elements, as we could see in France in 1968 and in Poland in 1980. This is precisely because the revolution is not a question of power. Power arises from the relations of production, from the nature of Capital as an omnipresent relationship. So long as you don't confront it as a social relation through attacks on the commodity and on wage labour, so long as you restrict yourself to occupying its terrain (France 1968), or to wanting to organize the economy better, in a ferocious way certainly, but without communisation (Poland 1980-81), then you don't undermine the power of Capital. It's power lies neither in the street nor in the factory, let alone in government ministries. Capital is a social relation which is embodied in a network of relationships. Starting to produce a different relation by constituting a different social fabric, this is how to attack the power of Capital.

Henri Simon repeats the error made about Portugal in 1974-5 (notably by the Situationist International : see also *la Guerre Sociale* issue 2) :

« For a period of eighteen months, Poland was no longer a real state; authority was constantly scoffed at and the economy seemed to be adrift. » (p. 136 Black and Red edition)

However the State was certainly there, even if asleep. On December 13th 1981 it proved that at the right moment it could awake, all its powers intact. Because the power of Capital had not been undermined.

Proletarian practise hadn't attacked what was fundamental. And it is the same for communist theory.

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history and personal narrative of the last fifteen years

## Prospects...

Protectionism doesn't seem to offer a viable exit to the crisis, for the economy has become far too internationalised over the last thirty years. The third world has been only superficially industrialised, but deeply urbanised. It is not uncommon for half the population of underdeveloped countries to live in cities or on their periphery. The working class in these countries is more organised than one might imagine. Nearly 40% of Bolivian workers are unionised. The Union Marocaine du Travail numbered 20% of the working population in 1956. But proletarian riots, like those which were crushed by the army in Egypt in 1971, seldom link up with movements by workers. Thus during the unrest in Casablanca in June 1981, the initiative for the action came from high school students and the unemployed.

All forms of action by wage workers are found worldwide. The Hara jeans factory in Thailand was occupied and re-started by the workers. In 1982 the free trade zone at Bataan in the Philippines was shaken by a strike of super-exploited workers (short-time working, excessive work-rotas, wages which literally corresponded to the minimum necessary for survival). At the start a multinational corporation had wanted to force 200 workers to work on six looms each, instead of four. 10,000 strikers supported these 200 rebels. The KMU, a trade-union formed in 1980, took part in this movement. Repression provoked a response so massive that the movement could no longer be repressed through anything short of a general massacre, by firing on the crowds, as at Lena in Tsarist Russia at the start of the century.

The bourgeoisie abandoned the arrests and dismissals, but the workers did not win either. From then on they had to work five looms each. The future will show what remains of the proletarian experience of this strike, and what becomes of the KMU.

After the strike one of the responses considered by the bosses of Bataan was automation. In Germany, after the great strikes by unskilled workers, and the actions of Turkish workers in the factories and streets in the 1970s, Capital responded with expulsions and modernisation. BMW pushed robotization to a high degree. Volkswagen was the first to manufacture and employ robots in West Germany. The tendency is towards a reduction in the role of unskilled workers, perhaps with their elimination as a strata in the vanguard of proletarians.

Throughout its history capitalism has taken on the most hybrid aspects, and no-one knows what forms it might evolve. The « second serfdom » in Eastern Europe (which began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century) was not a return to the middle ages. The owners of these new serfs were not capitalists, for they were not concerned about producing at the lowest labour cost. But they formed part of a market and capitalist system. They only succeeded in stifling the already flourishing market economy, to their own benefit, inside their large estates. These monopolies were still at the service of an international system that was indisputably capitalist.

Today once again, capitalism, a society of value in motion, shows evidence of great flexibility of form, and in the rediscovery of old structures.

« In the first factories as in certain factories today this collaborative work, in which skilled workers and unskilled labourers are harnessed to the common task, does not disappear in every case : the owner pays the total price for the work and the workers organize it in their own way (...) a great freedom for a wage of misery. » (*Les Temps Modernes*, February 1981, pp. 1355-1356).

In the French clothing industry during 1970-75, some companies installed assembly lines with fixed work stations. In 1975-6 some experimented with « modules », partial self-organisation with a rotation between work stations. After 1976, with the arrival of the crisis, and as work rates increased, some set up work-groups which even had the possibility of organising themselves outside the factory. We thus come back to a form of jobbing which existed before the Scientific Management of Work. These groups are set in competition with one another, transforming each of them into a co-operatively run labour-Capital, a form of organisation resembling that seen among the 20,000 illegal Turkish and Yugoslav workers in the Paris region.

The development of Capital does not necessarily result in the development of the most modern capitalist forms. Colonialism generated regressive forms : castes in India, private property preventing the transformation of ground rent into Capital, peonage in South America. Capitalism has reintroduced variants of serfdom or slavery. Free labour has mingled with forced labour. In Italy home-working has expanded over the last ten years. According to some sources it employs between one and two and a half million people.

Only in a distant future (if ever) will the society we are moving towards be entirely robotised and without human labour. But the proportion of workers in the population may perhaps be considerably decreased, while the mass of unemployed, recycled and trainees, etc., grows much greater.

Instead of an improbable push button factory, we are moving towards a situation in which whole sections of factories are robotised while others remain semi- or barely automated. Robots and the reduced numbers of unskilled workers co-exist within the same operation. To weld a front suspension to a car, instead of 4 unskilled welders and 2 unskilled labourers charged with setting in place and removing the pieces, there are now 4 robot welders and the 2 unskilled supplying the operation to be done. In engineering, they plan to keep the labourers (cleaners...), automate the areas where unskilled workers are currently employed (loading, handling, assembly in particular and machining), and keep the skilled workers (rectification, fitting). At Renault-Flins, on the assembly lines welding the body of the R18 which were automated in 1976, they lost 56 unskilled workers jobs and gained 24 people employed in maintenance, quality control and retouching. At Renault-Douai, this tendency has been taken much further. Peugeot which already has 300 robots installed envisages bringing 2000 into service by 1990.

In 1978 an academic study declared that 20% of the labour force employed in car assembly in the United States would be replaced by machines and automation by 1985; and that 20% of all American industrial employment would be restructured by 1989. According to a different forecast made in 1979, automation would eliminate 200,000 jobs in France by 1985, including office jobs (through Computer Aided Design, optical character reading and word processing, the electronic transfer of funds, typewriters with memories, fax machines). According to the same study

50,000 jobs would be lost in France through robotization. Middle management and supervisors would also be affected by the « contraction of the traditional hierarchical structure » (Quément, p. 191). Robotization already affects some sections of car production, forges and foundries, and the production of household appliances, large machines and aircraft.

« Lastly, it is to be feared that conditions of work regarding the supervision and maintenance of automatic machines of the robot variety is likely to involve modifications of behaviour because of the monotony of the work, the isolation resulting from the break up of social relations and the weight of responsibility arising from the significance of the risk of breakdown that would cause a halt in production.

The strategic place occupied by the workers and the risks of a deterioration of working conditions may in the long term generate new conflicts.

(...) Installed to suppress aspects of the social and economic crisis, this system generates others and allows us to foresee a gloomy future for unskilled workers, dispossessed of their employment (...) »

J. Le Quément, *Les Robots*, La Documentation Française, 1981, pp. 191 et 193.

« (...) half of the 5000 soviet robots produced between 1976 and 1980 remain unused because of the refusal of the factory directors to stop the assembly lines in order to install them. »

Le Monde Diplomatique, December 1982, based on a report by Gosplan.

In the industrialised countries the bourgeoisie and the state would like to compensate for the fall in employment through a development of the service sector (however this sector will also be affected), and by repatriating those industries which had previously been relocated to the third world in order to take advantage of lower wages and more favourable working conditions. This reindustrialisation of the capitalist metropolises, which has already begun in the United States (electrical engineering, electronic equipment), has been made possible because robots are less expensive and more reliable than foreign labour. However nothing will prevent the multinationals from establishing robots in the third world if they consider it profitable.

Thus a profound modification of the economically active population, and of social life in the previously industrialised countries, is taking place before our eyes. There might even be a change in working time. In our article on Poland we pointed out that in France the demand for a 35 hour week had not succeeded in mobilising workers. In 1978 there was a powerful movement demanding a 35 hour week in the German metalworking industry. But this remained the exception in a global context where intermediate demands are planned by Capital (and by the trade unions where they are strong enough to impose themselves on capitalist management). People optimistically evoke the four day week (four eight hour days) in the United States, with workers participation in the reorganisation of work. On this latter point at least, there is no capitalist progress : things are still as they were in 1930 or in 1950. There is no workers participation to speak of (except in periods of conflict when it is used to divert struggles onto the level of self- or co-management). Wage workers are wary of this right to participate in the running of the enterprise : above all they continue to demand more money and less work.

Only the union representatives knock themselves out to decipher the accounts which the bosses agree to show them.

In any case, a four day week would not be a « proletarian gain ». The ten hour day and the suppression of child labour, achieved in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also benefited the most modern Capital, which introduced machinery to save on labour. The 8 hour day which was obtained after 1918 *also* facilitated the generalisation of relative surplus value and the Scientific Management of Work. A reduction in working days would be both a *concession* by capitalism and *consistent* with it, paid for through a firmer grip over our entire lives. The French bourgeoisie has resisted it because it knows that it is weaker than its rivals.

To the unemployment caused by the crisis, will be added that caused by restructuring. Robotization involves such reserves of productivity that even an increase in demand and in outlets will not lead to a corresponding rise in recruitment. It will not prevent a reduction in the work-rotas of those in employment, but there will still be little or no sharing out of the socially available work. The CFDT will keep its reformist utopia to itself.

Currently, while waiting for the slow industrial reorganisation to be put in place, two planned projects aim at mastering the dangerous rebellious margin. The first of these projects has two tracks. It juxtaposes a modern economic sector alongside a traditional sector with a « more convivial and conventional way of life » capable of « cushioning the blows » (report for the French 8<sup>th</sup> Plan under Giscard). And it would multiply the institutions for managing those who are rejected by economic growth : youth, migrant workers, the handicapped, the old, children « at risk ». This project presupposes an open liberal economy, which sacrifices certain social strata but then subsequently gives them assistance.

The second project would integrate the dangerous strata and groups. This accompanies a more statist and protectionist economic strategy, with workers participation in the running of the state, through the trade unions and left wing parties.

The first solution openly divides society between those who can cope and the rest. The second pretends to bring everyone together, from the boss to the immigrant. In both cases it is necessary to manage a highly unstable minority. State as policeman or State as provider, *Workfare State* or *Welfare State*.

In the same way, confronted with the turmoil in the third world the bourgeoisies of the developed nations conduct two interlinked policies : either industrialising and assisting these countries through promoting modern ruling classes, or barely industrialising them to the minimum necessary for western and Japanese expansion, through promoting archaic and comprador ruling classes. The second tendency prevails because it corresponds better to reality. It responds better to the needs of world Capital, because the right manages Capital better. The first strategy is that of the socialist international as successfully employed in « revolutionary » Portugal in 1974-5, and taken up once again by the current French government, in particular in Central America. It is less capable of application, because it presupposes that the less industrialised countries are able to master their contradictions and achieve democracy. However democracy implies a social equilibrium which doesn't exist anywhere in the third world. The « north-south

dialogue » and the rights of man in their liberal or social democratic variants, remain as ideologies intended to absorb tensions. Reagan massacres and Mitterand deplores the massacres, which is more a way of preventing the start of massacres than of putting an end to them.

We don't need to put social conflicts under the microscope. Past and present history shows it all : the extraordinary capacity of Capital to digest dissent, such as the dissent that the social movement (which is sometimes communist) always gives rise to once again. Everything is in crisis, and yet everything remains the same.

Everywhere the most important force containing the revolution, the mediation between Capital and labour, is undermined. In the United Kingdom the Labour Party has difficulty in retaining its working class voters. In Germany the SPD is losing working class members and voters. In the United States the trade unions are only making headway in the civil service, they remain weak in the service industries which form an increasingly large part of the economy. (Macdonalds has more employees than US Steel). The AFL-CIO has been unsuccessful in limiting imports and has lost ground within the Democratic Party. It is poorly established in the new zones of development in the South and South-West.

The return of the French Communist Party into the government coalition in 1981 aroused no-one, either in France or elsewhere. The Americans didn't initiate a global press campaign against the « communist menace » in France. Conservative opinion played on old fears but it had to force itself to do so and no-one seriously expected a profound change with the arrival of the left into power. Militants saw in it only a springboard for something to be done later on, since for them everything comes down to creating the basis for real change through perpetual preparations for the following day. The enthusiasm of May 1981 doesn't cancel out the loss of the Lefts representation of itself. In modern democracy, where all programmes resemble one another, each party lives by the way it represents itself. If its programme ceases to appear sufficiently different from the others, it no longer has a programme. The Left has more voters than in 1960, but it has just as much difficulty in presenting a different image to that of the Right. In 1981 workers did not vote for nationalisations, but against the effects of the crisis.

Social democracy and the Communist Party feed on the vital energy which proletarians give them, and which they draw from them. The CFDT embodies a lucid and impossible reformism in the midst of this bloodless and vampiric Left – and not just politically, for on the directly social level the left also feeds on the limited struggles by workers. In the short term the CGT is more conservative than its rival, it better represents industrial labour at the expense of total Capital. The CFDT raises the problem of total Capital. But it does not yet form the leadership of technicians or the service sector : its main federation is that of the metalworkers. It seeks the means of ensuring standard conditions for wage labour in France, while preserving global stability. Hence its interventions in the third world and the East. The French Communist Party and the CGT have no other long term interest than the conquest of the state and unity with Eastern-bloc state capitalism, something that is no longer the case for the Italian Communist Party.

The decline of the CGT in the trade union elections and especially the weakening of its influence over militant activity by workers, still don't prevent it from clinging on. The general decline in the power and solutions of the left, whether or not this is

accelerated by its presence in government, is a profound phenomenon, which we will only see the extent of it when it is completed. Its internal collapse will still hold some surprises. The effects will be a lot more violent than in 1968. We cannot assess the impact of a future movement by looking at currently visible phenomena.

The foundations of all institutions are undermined. However that still leaves something which is not an institution, even though it also has a formal existence : democracy. Thanks to it the ruling minority at the head of all the anti-revolutionary institutions (army, police, bosses, trade unions, parties, etc.) will attempt to exploit the inertia of the silent majority against the minority, which today is often reduced to silence.

Parliamentary and trade union democracy are discredited. But democracy as a *mode of social relations* is not, because it corresponds to capitalist society. Capitalised man enters into relation with the world through the needs that he satisfies (via the market). Democracy meets a need, like money, and offers the same illusory freedom. The wage worker is free to use his wages to buy whatever he wants. Democracy also offers him a choice, just as limited as that offered by the supermarket. But the illusion of choice doesn't prevent either the *reality* of the need, or its questionable but effective satisfaction. After all, there is *undoubtedly* a difference between Coca-Cola and Pepsi. There is a correspondence between democratic freedom and democracy as an aspiration, on the one hand, and the freedom to work and the exchange and expenditure of money on the other, a structural relationship which does not involve psychology, but arises from the way in which men and things enter into relation with one another under capitalism.

The current retreat of the extreme-left, the lack of interest in « revolution », Reagan's election, the « return to conformism among young people » and all the other secondary phenomena which are exaggerated by fashionable opinion – we are not bothered about these things. Such a situation can turn itself around very swiftly. The problem lies rather in the secular tendency of the proletariat to rise up without constituting, in any more than an embryonic state, « the movement which abolishes the conditions of existence ». Perhaps it will transpire that this is a false question which needs to be posed differently. Today the minimum requirement is to not avoid asking it, for that will only rebound on those who avoid doing so.

There is nothing unusual about the annihilation which the minority with revolutionary ambitions has been subject to. After 1914-18, it had to learn that the whole of the workers movement served Capital, including the « communist » organisations of the Third International. The progression of the Russian revolution to counter-revolution, and the liquidation of any revolutionary perspective by Stalinism, was also difficult to accept. After having pronounced the supremacy of the workers movement, people saw it collapse in Germany, the country where it was strongest, yielding without resistance in the face of an openly reactionary movement which knew how to give itself a popular base.

Capital's ability to make war from 1939-45 without encountering working class resistance, and the success of the post-war reconstruction, which was achieved without much upheaval, was another unpleasant surprise. Today we see a different reality which is also hard to swallow : the non-constitution of an organised movement which is in any sense coherent, and the absence of the lasting links which one might have believed could have been forged after 1968. This absence of

a coherent movement, even in embryo, is all the more difficult to grasp when we take note of the qualitative leap in the theoretical grasp of communism and the revolution.

Between the organised groups of revolutionaries and the nuclei of radical proletarians, few in number but capable of intervening within their own milieu, there are practically no lasting relations. Since roughly 1972, groups of revolutionaries have above all been publishers. Nearly all of their activity consists of distributing theory, which they get across through leaflets or magazines. Communists do not have to support social action. They form part of it and either reinforce it or else, given the circumstances, they hold aloof. To give support would be to once again see revolutionaries as « outsiders » in relation to a milieu which they must « penetrate ». But today, as an activity, theorising is more cut-off from social life than in 1968-72, because social life itself is more separated, compartmentalised and cut off from its own roots.

Proletarians, and proletarian workers in particular, have lost neither their numerical importance, nor their central role in revolutionary activity. Even in the developed countries, wage labour will never be embodied solely in the service sector (just as not all workers became unskilled workers). Who lies at the heart of society ? Factory workers, but also those employed in communications, the supply and distribution of electricity (in France the EDF) and of water, hospital workers, and so on. If they stop work, everything comes to a stop. They can bring society to a halt and can break it up from the inside.

At the conclusion of this history of the last fifteen years, which is also our own history, a situation very different to 1968 presents itself. A transformation has not been successfully completed. A society which is still based on wage labour has been forced to modify it and to exclude one part of the workforce. The crucial point is to determine whether the intervention of the proletariat in this transformation will be the occasion for a revolutionary assault.

Capital's strength is such that some people are led to see nothing more within society, and thus within the activity of proletarians, than capitalism, and they reread the history of the last 150 years, including the proletarian assaults, as a series of capitalist transformations. These people only adopt the opposite point of view to the common ultra-left habit of interpreting everything as a step towards the revolution. There isn't a unique subject of history. Neither the development of the productive forces, nor the search for community, nor the proletariat are the sole engine of historical evolution. The movement of history is neither a succession of adaptations to Capital, nor of proletarian struggles, but a totality which includes all of this. Capitalist society lives on the contradictory Capital-labour relation, but it can also die from it. One drives the other to act, and vice versa. Crises are those moments when this unity is called into question, before being reinforced if the crisis does not have a communist outcome. Revolution is the solution to this contradiction. To presuppose in advance that the next great social crisis will be resolved in Capital's favour, is to reason on capitalist lines, and to speak for it.

What gives us hope, and encourages us to act, is a complex reality in which, inevitably, the capitalist element is currently dominant. The erosion of values and the devaluation of ideologies spares nothing. The « refusal of work » is a polyvalent reality, the sign of something new both for Capital and for communism. The « new

social movement » is embodied in the different varieties of misappropriation and rejection of work, but also in clandestine work, in the black economy, in shared work, in home-working, in temporary and subcontracted work and so on. All of this had existed in the past but has been renewed by crisis and restructuring.

People « no longer believe » in work, but this spectacularly displayed disaffection counts for less than the underlying fact : that the old critique of the *organisation* of work is now mixed up with a critique of its *basis*. The former is the work of proletarians who want to reclaim work, and along with it wage labour. The second abandons work, considering it as a prison for mankind. The first seeks to reorganise the productive act, the logic of which escapes proletarians – and which will still escape from them even when reorganised. The second seeks to destroy the obstacle which this productive act represents for the human activity which it confines. Which of these two critiques will prevail ?

The *positive* affirmation of communism does not consist of replacing theory with life. Texts like *A World Without Money* or *For a World without Moral Order* consider the origins of the problems which capitalism poses for humanity, and show not only how those problems can be solved, but also what upheavals will presuppose and lead to that solution. At that time « the negative truly includes the positive » (Marx). Until now the positive has remained abstract, and was always constructed somewhere else (utopia). The practical urgency, which first appeared at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reappears today. Already some formulas sound false. To speak of the « dictatorship of the proletariat » or even of the « abolition of wage labour » without referring to the process of communist revolution, is merely to employ slogans, and to imitate leftism.

Expanding the theoretical horizon means attempting a unitary critique which does not privilege the past at the expense of the present, or the Eastern bloc at the expense of the West. The historical arc of industrial capitalism, characterised by the emergence of the traditional labour movement and its subsequent disappearance, (that is to say from 1789 or 1848 to date), encompasses a human reality that is too restricted to allow us to grasp, not just what communist revolution is, but even what has happened since 1789 or 1848. There is no need to embrace *zen* in order to recognise that revolutionary theory has remained too euro-centric and too concerned with the period from 1848 to 1914.

Unitary critique concerns time as well as space. The traditional labour movement needed heroes, it treated the past in the mode of myth : the founders (Marx or Bakunin), the *mur des fédères*, the martyrology... After 1917 the revolutionary movement neither wanted nor was able to break with this mythology. It was too weak to draw its imaginative resources from within itself. So the communist left and the libertarians maintained the mythology, all the while believing that they were opposing real revolutionary movements to the counter-revolution which had triumphed in the name of socialism or communism. Finally, the radical recovery since 1968, (in particular in the Situationist International), has largely tended to oppose Stalinism and leftism by means of anti-bureaucratic myths : 1871, Makhno, Barcelona 1936 and so on; and while this was inevitable to begin with, it will undoubtedly be necessary to go beyond this. Generally the gaze cast on these events generates a quantitative rather than qualitative critique, as if at those times proletarians had only needed to continue onwards instead of stopping in their tracks. In reality, the road itself was mined. On the other hand the temptation to

reinterpret everything as a moment of adaptation to Capital is content to adopt the opposite of these ultra-left legends. Let us take the past for what it was, and not exalt it for our own ends, with the sole aim of filling the current vacuum with illusions. One of the signs of the rebirth of a communist movement will be the decay of all mythology, because there will no longer be any need for it.